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The Xmas file



TREES TAKE TO CATWALK

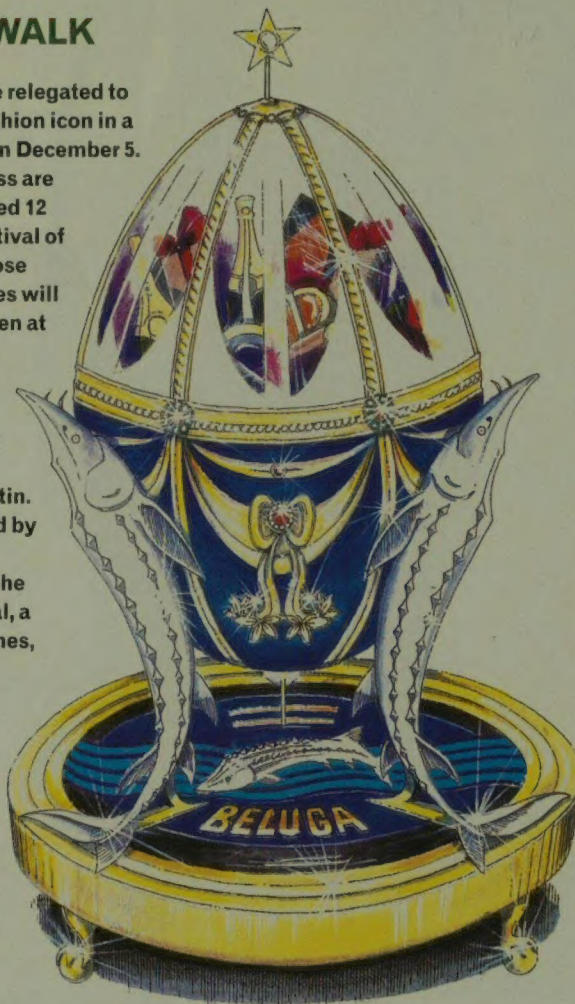
The traditional Christmas tree is to be relegated to dinosaur status and recreated as a fashion icon in a gala at the Natural History Museum on December 5.

Stella McCartney and Lulu Guinness are among the top names who have created 12 stunning designer models for the Festival of Trees, providing inspiration for all those bored with last year's baubles. All trees will be auctioned in aid of Save the Children at the end of the evening and guests will include the Princess Royal and a host of media celebrities.

Guinness' "Glamour Girl" design is in silver wrought iron with circular mirrors encased in pink and purple satin. Others include "The Tzarina" donated by Caviar House featuring an elaborate Fabergé egg on a sturgeon base, and the "Tree of Light" from Waterford Crystal, a magnificent chandelier with 12 branches, topped with a glass star.

Bids are expected to range up to £20,000, helping to reach a fundraising target of £250,000. For more information, contact Save the Children on 020 7703 5400.

The Tzarina Christmas tree design from Caviar House, right. Spend the holidays on ice at Somerset House, top right, or at the Dome.



Have an ice Christmas

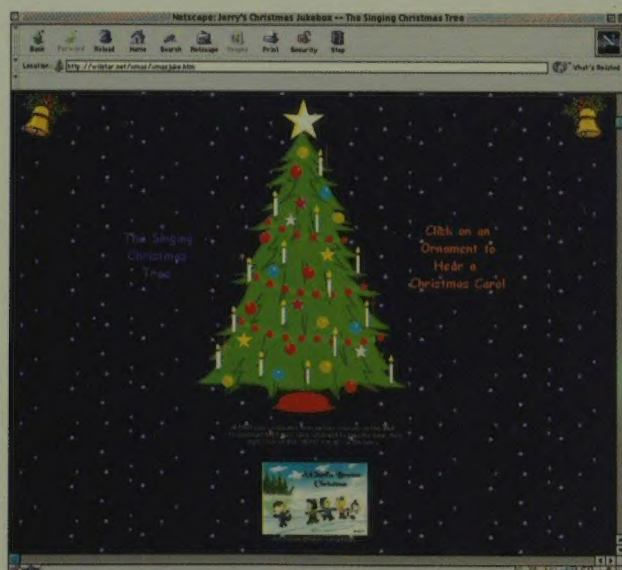
Not since the days of the Frost Fairs has there been the promise of so much fun on ice in London.

Get your skates on and you could be doing triple toe loops at Somerset House or at the Millennium Dome, both of which are planning public ice rinks for the duration of the festive season.

Reminiscent of New York's Rockefeller Plaza, the open-air rink at Somerset House will be in the courtyard of the arts complex which opened this summer. Skate hire will be from adjacent marquees, while the courtyard's 55 computerised fountains will add to the sense of occasion.

The Dome's ice rink is part of a festive extravaganza designed to entice last-chance visitors before the attraction closes on New Year's Eve. As well as skating fun for all the family, there will be giant Christmas trees, an ice sculpture competition and the Dome's own Christmas Pantomime.

TOP: PETER DUBANT; ABOVE RIGHT: THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY



CHRISTMAS AT A CLICK

The age of the online Christmas is nigh as websites proliferate offering a plethora of seasonal options from the useful to the festively frivolous.

If buying and signing Christmas cards is a chore, visit <xmas.co.uk> where you can design and send your own e-cards for free. To send your Christmas wish list to Santa, simply e-mail it via <callmesanta.com>.

On a more practical level, <christmastreeland.co.uk> will deliver a Christmas tree to your door—choose from eight varieties. The ideal toy can be found at <hamleys.co.uk>, while Tesco, Boots and Waterstones

are among the retailers offering an e-shopping service, allowing you to order goods from the comfort of your home.

At <giftsdirect.co.uk> you can choose from a range of Scottish hampers and access a host of small makers of everything from fine art prints to teddy bears.

But if you're feeling silly, go straight to <wilstar.net/xmasjuke> and call up the Singing Christmas Tree—just click a decoration to hear a carol.

You can even fulfil your religious needs at <textweek.com> which provides online liturgical resources to help you enjoy a Holy Christmas.



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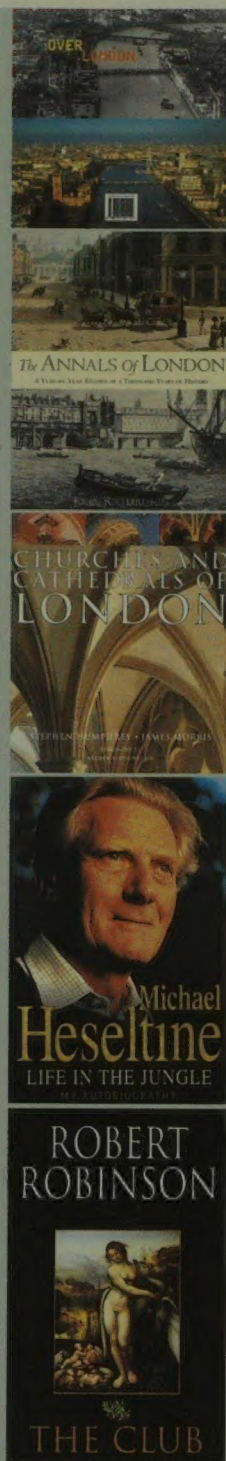
A world city and a collection of villages, ancient capital and the apex of cool Britannia: one of London's greatest charms is its capacity to be seen from different angles, all of them equally valid. Several new books reflect this multiplicity, viewing the city in turn by photographic essay, historical diary and as religious citadel, home to some of the world's greatest churches. In *Over London, A Century of Change* (Harper Collins, £19.99) Jason Hawkes takes to a helicopter to retrace the routes of old aerial photographers, matching their images with modern shots. The result is hours of fun poring over the old and new pictures playing spot-the-difference. The accompanying text is also illuminating—did you know that Bush House, home of the BBC World Service, is named after the American businessman Irving T Bush who built it?

The Annals of London by John Richardson (Cassell & Co, £30) has more than 900 entries in its historical diary, one for each year since the Norman Conquest in 1066. The events recorded form a fascinating account of the changing political, social and economic scene. But there are some linking themes, such as the controversy surrounding landmark buildings. The annals begin with recording the doubts about Westminster Abbey being built in a swamp and end with the Dome fiasco.

The rise and fall and rise of London's churches is recorded in the sumptuously illustrated *Churches and Cathedrals of London* by Stephen Humphrey and James Morris (New Holland, £24.99)—from the frenzied building of the medieval era, to the destruction of the Great Fire and the Wren projects of the 17th century.

Swansea rather than London was the starting point of Michael Heseltine's career, whose autobiography *Life in the Jungle* (Hodder & Stoughton, £20) begins with his birth there in 1933 and goes on to record his triumphant rise through the ranks of the Conservatives. You will have to flick to the end for any political intrigue however, mostly surrounding the Westland affair over which he resigned from Thatcher's government.

Leaving the weighty tomes aside, settle down with Robert Robinson's *Call My Bluff* caper of art theft amid the button-backed chairs of *The Club* (Hale, £17.99). A lost Leonardo turns up on the walls of a gentleman's club in St James', setting the brandy glasses a-quiver with intrigue: who is blackmailing a gay civil servant?; which member is helping the Japanese tycoon to hijack the loot?; and is the painting really by Leonardo—you decide.



New Year near you

Stay at home this New Year's Eve and you won't miss a thing. Or so Mayor Ken Livingstone would have you believe, as he and his party-meister Bob Geldof aim to recreate the spirit of the millennium but without the crush.

The £2 million-plus celebrations, designed to stop hundreds of thousands of people crowding into central London, will feature dancing in a street near you; performance stages; giant screens all over the capital; and a firework display (by the people who did the Sydney Olympics) so big you will be able to see it from Hampstead to Crystal Palace.

Focus of the festivities in the centre will be a giant Meridian Clock featuring self-portraits of schoolchildren from around the city.

The theme of the events is "Ringing in the Changes" and church bells will be pealing during the day—but not at midnight. In fact the whole thing, including fireworks, will be over by 7pm, leaving you free to make your own arrangements for singing *Auld Lang Syne*.



Hamleys has undergone a total transformation.

OLD NAMES, NEW TRICKS

Go down to Regent Street this Christmas and you're in for a big surprise. The grand old lady of West End shopping is attracting hip names from abroad, while British favourites are reinventing themselves with gusto for the 21st century.

Hamleys has had a complete makeover—it now has a whole floor devoted to computer games, and kids will love the slime factory. To celebrate the new look, excerpts from the RSC production of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* will be performed in-store during late November and December (020 7494 2000).

Austin Reed's centenary celebrations will continue up to the New Year—keep an eye out for special offers and promotions and for the new Regent Street Christmas lights which were due to be switched on from the store on November 14.

Meanwhile, across the street, Barcelona-chic has arrived in the shape of fashion store Mango. French leisurewear store Aigle has opened its first UK shop at number 172, while US fashion retailer Liz Claiborne has launched its only store in Europe on Regent Street.

BY WILLIAM HIGGINS



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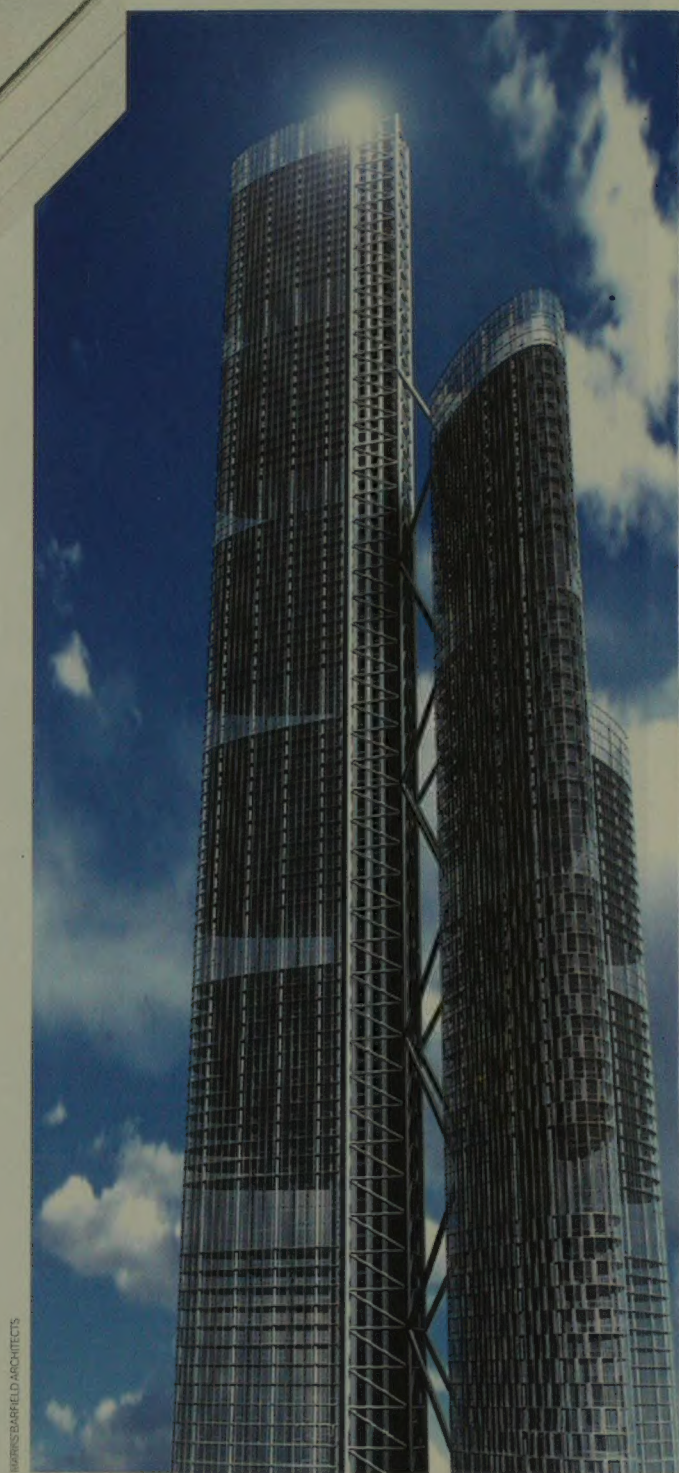


New Year Revolutions

As the first year of the new millennium draws to a close, Paul Wade asks a selection of movers and shakers what they think the next decade will bring.

2000 The date truly was a catalyst. After one wild New Millennium Eve a matter of months ago, there is a tangible resurgence of confidence in the capital. "If London were a living thing," writes Peter Ackroyd in *London The Biography*, "we would say that all of its optimism and confidence have returned. It has again become the 'capital of all capitals' in every cultural and social sense. The world flocks to it and, once more, it has become a youthful city." Typifying that new assurance are the South Bank neighbours, the London Eye and Tate Modern. Suddenly, the arts are chic. Going to a gallery, admiring a building, talking about design and books, fashion and food, are no longer the domain of the few.

Maybe, at last, Londoners can forget about the spirit of the Blitz and the last time England won the World Cup. Just as the Great Exhibition of 1851 celebrated the nation's technological skills, so the new millennium has helped to swivel heads from the past to the future. When architects Julia Barfield and David Marks dreamed up the concept of the Wheel, they wanted to bring a smile to everyone's face, they wanted to "make things better". We talk to them, and other movers and shakers, about their aims and aspirations for the coming decade.



MARKS BARFIELD ARCHITECTS

Above, the proposed Skyhouse building will consist of three teardrop-shaped towers each radiating from a central supportive spine. It is designed for a mix of people and activities, with affordable homes, nurseries, restaurants and gardens.



TELEGRAPH GROUP LTD

Barfield and Marks, architects

STAND BY. The team that brought you the Wheel has now designed the Spike. Julia Barfield and David Marks, the architects of the London Eye have already planned their next London landmark, the Skyhouse. "London has a massive housing problem, which cannot be solved by simply pushing it on to the rest of the south-east," says David Marks. Lining the walls of their studios just off Clapham Common, are artists' impressions of their solution, a 21st-century version of the skyscraper.

These are exciting times for the couple. "The Wheel has opened so many doors. We can write to people and they will listen. It's a tremendous springboard for other projects." It has also boosted their profession as a whole. Not so long ago, architects were the object of considerable suspicion. Back in 1984, Prince Charles called a proposed extension to the National Gallery a "monstrous carbuncle" and spawned a rash of retro-Georgian architecture across the city.

The Wheel has helped to change all that. "The thing about the Wheel is that it shows the public that architecture can break out of convention, can be for the ordinary person." Barfield is diminutive and enthusiastic, Marks, tall and more measured. Both are passionate about their work, interrupting one another as they speak. "And it's not just architecture: it's architecture and engineering, working in tandem. They can be bold, exciting, fun and sculptural. And accessible and approachable. These are qualities we want to bring to a wider audience."

Partners both in private and public life, Julia Barfield and David Marks temper their enthusiasm with a welcome social awareness. Living in Stockwell in South London, they are surrounded by housing estates. "It's a very mixed area, but you can

"We want to build skyscrapers for living in, not for commerce."

never forget the people who are obviously having a very hard time," says Julia. David interrupts, declaring that this sort of soulless development is on the wane. While admitting that architects and engineers designed the housing estates, he points out that, "they were ordered by politicians. Socially, it was a complete disaster. Estates were seen as a solution to a housing problem, but ended up by creating ghettos. What makes a healthy village, city or metropolis is the mix of people who are time-rich and cash-poor with those who are cash-rich and time-poor."

Their solution? The Skyhouse. "We want to build skyscrapers for living in, not for commerce." Instead of the lone monoliths of the past, they have come up with a cluster of three towers, connected vertically, so that each strengthens the other. But what about the famous British antipathy to tower blocks, matched by a deep-seated love of house and garden? The couple see a change. They believe that we are developing a new taste for apartment- and loft-living, as long as the design and facilities are right. The key is a feeling of community. Their

tower combines everything from restaurants and crèches to mixed-income accommodation.

"We all know about the problems of key workers not being able to find affordable homes in London. After all, without reasonable housing in the centre of the city, who will open the gates at the Tube station at six in the morning? Low-paid workers might qualify for a sliding scale of housing subsidy. Then there are schemes for part-ownership, and contracts between tenants and associations. Tenants might also have responsibilities as well as rights." Listening to Barfield and Marks talk about the future, you cannot help but share their excitement about the changes in London.

They see consultation as the key to success, to getting agreement between the planners, the architects and the public. Take the Wheel. "There were over 100 different organisations involved: groups, institutions, neighbours, agencies, societies and individuals who wanted and needed to be consulted. It took a couple of years to get planning permission, but it showed that it could be done."

That optimism, symbolic of the start of a new century and a new millennium, bodes well for the "capital of all capitals".

Lars Nittve,
Director,
Tate Modern

"WHEN TATE MODERN opened I walked through the galleries with some of Britain's best-known artists and they were really, really moved. They told me they never thought that they would ever step into a world-class modern art gallery in London. After all, when you think about it, New York has had the Museum of Modern Art, a world-class space for modern art, for 71 years."

The success of Tate Modern has taken everyone by surprise: the art world, the press, the critics, even the Director Lars Nittve himself. Within five months of opening, over three million people have visited the converted power station. For a large percentage, this was their first visit to a modern art gallery of any sort. No wonder Nittve is pleased. "There is a new audience. We recognise, of course, that there is a curiosity factor, but I also reckon that this could be a significant moment in British contemporary art. Suddenly, visual art, modern art has moved higher up on the agenda." Not that Swedish-born Nittve is taking all the credit. He sees Tate Modern as the successful result of an ongoing process that has been developing for 30 years. Rather as "blockbuster" exhibitions at traditional galleries have pulled in the crowds, so, too, has the opening of Tate Modern focused attention on contemporary art.

For galleries and museums throughout the British Isles, there are valuable lessons to be learned from what has happened on the South Bank. "Of

"I think the museum's popularity will affect what people call taste."

course, visitors come because they are curious about the building. But they love the atmosphere inside, too. They feel open when they meet the art." But Tate Modern is so much more than just another stop on London's tourist trail. According to Nittve, the contents are as magnetic as the setting. "People do come for the art. They spend more time here than we expected, and they spend more time looking at the art than we expected."

Alongside Tate Modern's curiosity factor, an intellectual row has kept interest in London's landmark millennium project on the boil ever since last May. Where most museums group works by school or date, the curators here decided to organise the collection by themes. So, works in different media are juxtaposed, where most galleries keep them apart. Although traditionalists hate the concept, most visitors don't know, and don't care, what the fuss is all about. "It's not what medium artists work in, it's how they use it to convey their message that counts," says Nittve. "Whether it is oil on

canvas or video, bronze or photographs is not important. They all have different histories, and some histories are longer than others. That's why we have tried to get away from the hierarchical way of displaying different mediums and techniques."

After spending time there, we could well be taking home much more than a fistful of postcards of giant spiders. "I think the museum's popularity will affect what is usually labelled as 'taste', what people choose to hang on their walls. The more you see, the more you look, the more you appreciate art, the more sophisticated you become. And this will affect what you have in your home. This will take time; it's a slow process, but it will affect the way we live." And, as Nittve discovered when he showed artists around, there has been an equally important effect on the artists themselves. They have received a huge psychological boost. "They see Tate Modern as a symbol of acceptance for British artists."

If the success of the Tate Modern seems almost too good to be true, Nittve has no illusions about the next decade. "We can't expect the same numbers. It would be great, but not realistic. The curiosity factor is bound to diminish. This was the year to visit. In future, we expect about four to five million visitors a year." As for what he should or should not do: "There is no recipe for the future. Fortunately we have a gallery that is big enough to hold more than one special exhibition at a time, so we can have two running concurrently." He looks forward to putting on a balance that will satisfy the intellectual as well as the casual visitor. "We could have one show featuring an artist, such as Matisse, Magritte or Picasso, that is scholarly and well-researched, and balance that with an exhibition of something challenging. In that way, we can create a dialogue between classical and contemporary."

Although many of the works have the general public gasping and giggling, Nittve considers that "the gap between us and the public isn't that big. It's like opening a magazine, and flipping through the pages. You see an article and think—that's what I wanted to read, even though I didn't know it when I picked up the magazine. It's like that, we have to be just ahead of the reader, ahead of the visitor."

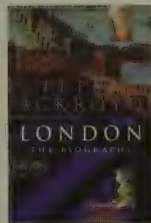
Peter
Ackroyd,
novelist

"Cockney is one of the oldest surviving languages—it's essentially 13th century."

IF ONE MAN knows London inside out, it has to be Peter Ackroyd, author of the 822-page blockbuster, *London The Biography*. He grew up in Acton, in west London and has walked the streets, mean and magnificent, for most of his 50 years. Despite his fascination for London's past, Ackroyd is no fan of the Disney school of history. In fact, his laissez-faire attitude comes as quite a shock. "We have always destroyed and rebuilt, vandalised and reconstructed. Old pubs and coffee houses have come and gone. Something else always rolls along to take their place." The higgledy-piggledy city fascinates him: "One of London's strengths is that it has never bowed to the town planners. Sir Christopher Wren's grand plans after the Great Fire of London never materialised. London has its own organic life," he asserts.

In his book, Ackroyd traces London's life through various themes. One is language. "Cockney is one of the oldest surviving languages, along with Icelandic; it's essentially 13th century. Yet you can still hear it in Clerkenwell and Islington, as far east as Barking, and in Bermondsey. Although it's being modified by television, American cinema and Australian soaps, Cockney is a symbol of continuity." Looking to the future, Ackroyd expects Cockney to survive and also hopes that ancient areas such as Clerkenwell

will reclaim their identity. "As we speak, Smithfield is doing just that. I expect that the South Bank will become more like central London. And, of course, the River Thames will rival the motorways, taking much more traffic." His pasting shot is reserved for the Millennium Dome. "I would hand it over to the Museum of London and let them deal with it." *London The Biography* by Peter Ackroyd is published by Chatto & Windus, £25.



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**Clive
Arrowsmith,
photographer**

CLIVE ARROWSMITH'S photographs are part of our daily lives. He captures fashion models and royals, creates Pirelli calendars and classic pop images. If he worked in the USA or Germany, his portraits would hang in homes as well as galleries. In Britain, however, photography is yet to be regarded as mainstream art, but that will change, predicts Arrowsmith. "In 20 years' time, photography will be accepted as an aesthetic art form in the UK."

Right now, of course, technology is all important and the buzz word is "digital". Arrowsmith is no

Luddite; after a recent shoot for a glossy magazine in an exotic location, he handed the art director a couple of CDs. "He wasn't quite sure what to do with them," he laughs. Yet, this photographer insists that digital images cannot match traditional film—yet. He chuckles about the new generation of young photographers, with all their computerised equipment, some of whose work he has been called in to reshoot when their cameras simply weren't up to the job. This is most noticeable where precision work is called for. "I have been doing some work for a cosmetics ad, with close-ups of lips and eyes. Up close there are little hairs, veins in the eyes, which you can remove using digital technology. So the ideal is to take pictures on regular film, then scan them into the computer and adjust them. But taking close-ups with a digital camera flattens everything, as if panstick has been applied. The eyes and nose look as if they have been stuck on." While many people are predicting the demise of the

film processing studio, Arrowsmith reckons that in years to come there will still be a role for traditional photography. "You'll hear people whisper 'he uses real film, y'know!'"

Clive Arrowsmith's website is <www.clive-arrowsmith.co.uk>.

"In 20 years' time, I think photography will be accepted as an aesthetic art form in the UK."



**Vineet
Bhatia,
restaurateur**

"I want Indian cuisine to be recognised as one of the world's great cuisines."

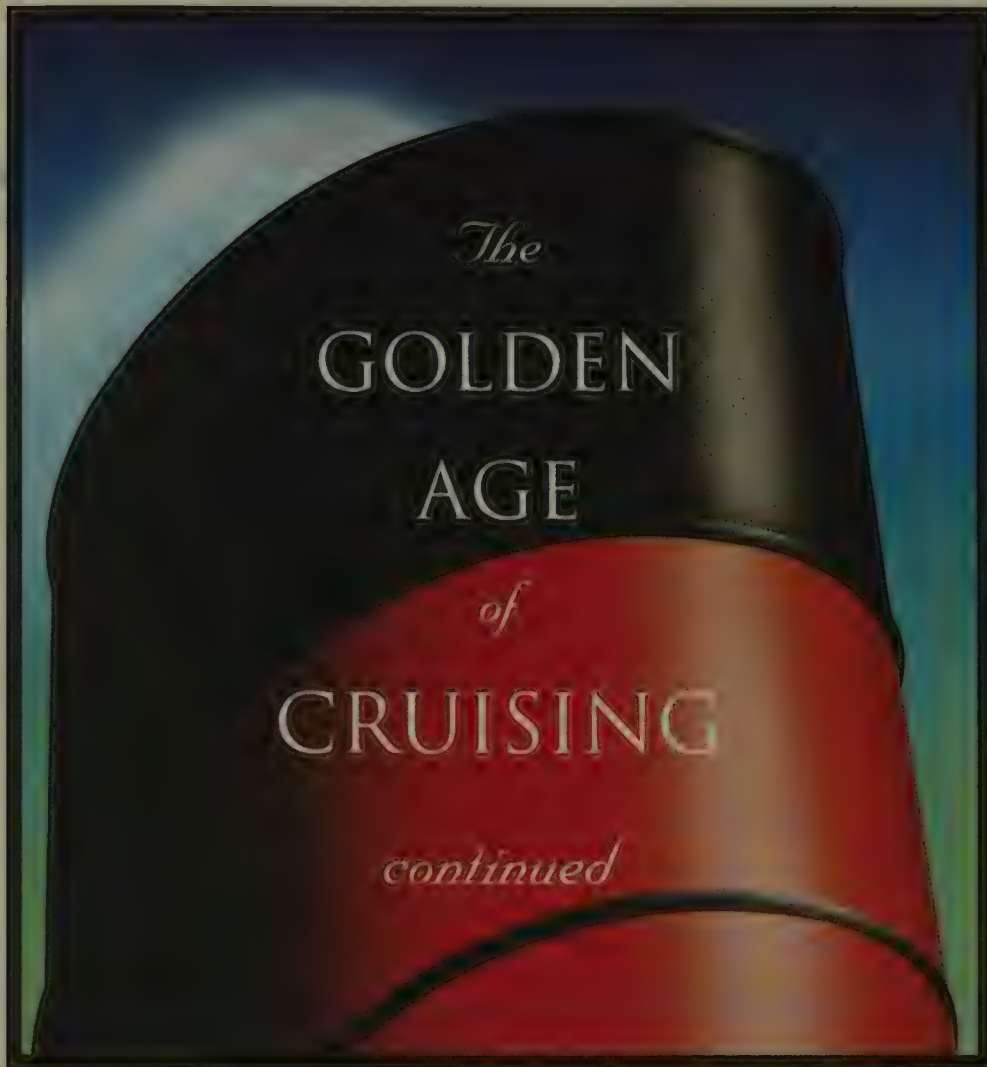
LONDON'S CLAIM TO be the restaurant capital of the world is no longer treated as an example of English humour. Today's chefs are stars, and among those shining the brightest is Vineet Bhatia. In his Zaika restaurant on the Fulham Road, this 32-year old produces dishes that leave critics stuck for words. How do you describe the flavour and texture of king prawns infused in a saffron and spice marinade, then roasted in the tandoor? Or chicken in a spicy fennel and coriander seed masala? This is Indian cooking taken to new heights.

With all the assurance of a maestro, "Vinny" maintains that cooking is both an art and a science. And it is constantly evolving. "Ten years back, fancy gadgets appeared—such as a blow torch, then a frothing machine to bubble up your sauces and your soups. In the future, I expect to see faster heat, or some kind of infra-red spray gun to make grill effects on your salmon."

Although pots and tandoors won't change, he sees himself cooking something "more spectacular, more exotic, much more refined". The trend towards less red meat and more fish will continue. Five of his ten main courses are seafood. Although conscious of dietary needs, he remains sensible. "I use double cream, butter and clarified butter (ghee), but I use it in moderation, for flavour, not to dominate the dish."

And, what would he like to see 10 years down the road? He doesn't pause for thought. "I want Indian food to be recognised as one of the world's great cuisines, along with French, Italian and Chinese." Vineet Bhatia is at Zaika, 257/259 Fulham Road, SW3. Tel: 020 7351 7823.





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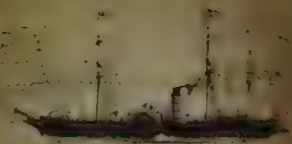
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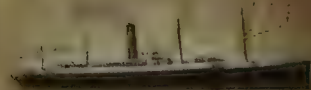
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**Ian
McDiarmid,
Director,
The Almeida**

WHILE INTEREST IN things visual has soared throughout 2000, the performing arts have been shrouded in storm clouds. Ian McDiarmid, artistic director of Islington's Almeida Theatre (pictured above, seated, with co-director Jonathan Kent) is not disconcerted. "Of course theatre goes through phases. But, ultimately, there is nothing like it: that intimate communion in the dark. People like it, need it and seek it out." In February 2001, the Almeida "goes dark" for 18 months of renovation; appropriately, the last run features *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's final play. In the meantime, the company will perform in a variety of venues, including a bus garage in King's Cross, where Frank Wedekind's *Lulu* will be revived in March.

With increasing evidence that many children are bored with staring at a small screen in the living

room, and with places to study drama at university over-subscribed, McDiarmid is optimistic about the future of theatre: "Teachers are always telling me that children are excited by doing drama, using their imagination. They, too, are looking for novelty. It's not just that it's live, it's alive."

The Almeida itself is not merely alive, it is positively restless. In the 10 years since Ian McDiarmid and Jonathan Kent took an 1837 building and transformed it into one of London's most dynamic theatres, they have started a season in Malvern, performed in the West End and done *Hamlet* in Hackney. "You have to have continuous movement. You need a connection with local people, to create an atmosphere that makes them want to be there irrespective of who is in the play."

There is, he admits, a shortage of directors with ideas, and the will to carry them through. "When theatre boards are looking for their next director, they need to hire people who take risks. A safe pair of hands is the death of theatre."

"Theatre boards need to hire people who take risks. A safe pair of hands is death to the theatre."

That's why McDiarmid and Kent are always looking for new material. "Not necessarily new plays, but undiscovered ones. We're targeting plays in the European repertoire. They have a common frame of reference: the problem is getting the right translators. Take Richard Wilbur's translations of Molière, for example. They are brilliant." McDiarmid smiles. "We put on Shakespeare in Shoreditch. Now it's *Lulu* in King's Cross: also appropriate, but in an entirely different way!"

Ian McDiarmid plays Prospero in The Tempest, at the Almeida, Dec 14-Feb 17. Box office 020 7359 4404.



"We are at last seeing literary culture reflecting the real make-up of this country."

STEP INTO YOUR local book store and you are walled in by centuries worth of classics as well as new tomes. So, where has the novel come from and where is it going? Ask Sarah Dunant, writer, journalist, critic and literary prize judge, and you get strong views. "No one will ever write like Dickens again. In the 19th century, novelists worked with a fine brush, using little strokes to build up a picture. I was reading a Conrad novel the other day. The opening was endless, filling in the image of a South American town bit by bit. You can't do that now." She sees films as a major influence on modern writers; indeed, her latest book, *Mapping the Edge*, has an intricate plot with the sort of inter-cutting that you might expect in a movie. As for the future, Dunant looks forward to the day when critics stop typecasting writers. She has received many awards for her mystery novels, yet is firmly pigeonholed under the "thriller" label.

Yet, you find literary novelists using the techniques of thriller writers. "Margaret Atwood's new novel *The Blind Assassin* could easily be a murder mystery. It's full of questions all the way through." One critic has suggested that Dunant is developing a brand-new type of fiction, the "discussion novel". "I think by that she meant that I am pushing the

**Sarah
Dunant,
novelist**

thriller genre forward. Not only does the book set out to excite, but it also puts ideas up front. So there's a collision between mystery and discussion."

Looking to the future of the novel, Dunant's enthusiastic torrent of words halts. "That's very difficult. The next 10 years could be particularly significant in Britain. With writers like Zadie Smith and Joan Anim-Addo, we are at last seeing literary culture reflecting the real make-up of this multicultural country." She pauses again. "It's the beginning of a long, long journey."

Mapping the Edge by Sarah Dunant is published in paperback by Warner Books, £5.99.

PAUL WADE is the author of 25 books, and writes for *The Telegraph*, *The Daily Express* and *Gourmet*.



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Sing, choirs of angels

Choral singing, be it sacred music, Gregorian plainchant or gospel rhythm, is thriving in London. Jack Watkins joins the rousing chorus.

A fusion of many different types of music including rap, swing beat and R&B, creates the dynamic sounds for which the London Community Gospel Choir, left, is renowned. Southwark Cathedral made history earlier this year by becoming the first cathedral in London to launch an all girls' choir, above right.



THIS SUMMER, Southwark Cathedral stole a headline or two with its launch of the first all-girls' choir in a London cathedral. In essence, though it beamed a welcome shaft of sunlight on a building too often in the shadow of its more vaunted big sisters, St Paul's and Westminster, there was little new about this. Countrywide, 18 of 42 Anglican cathedrals now have practising girls' choirs, and congregations at parish churches have long grown used to hearing female vocalists. But it will have done much for Southwark's image, which is no bad thing when it is in the middle of an ambitious £11 million restoration appeal. And it served as a timely reminder to those seeking refuge from the year-long barrage of tacky millennium extravaganzas that one of the lasting excellences of London has been its church choral music.

You might think that the decline in numbers of worshipping Christians would have a knock-on effect on choral music. And so it has; getting people to sacrifice time to choirs for a pittance or less has for some time been a cause for concern. Yet for Londoners the choice, from the asceticism of the Gregorian chant to the limb-loosening immediacy of Gospel rhythm, appears wide and flourishing.

This buoyancy owes much, according to Professor John Harper, Director General of the Royal School of Church

Music, to the reliance of many central London churches on small, professional or semi-professional ensembles. "Large numbers of young singers, who are at conservatoires or starting out alongside a main career, provide a pool of talent. Many travel in to central London, and there appears to be a strong spirit of commitment and enthusiasm among the singers."

Such commitment is embodied by the 20-strong choir at St Martin-in-the-Fields, a rare example of an amateur choir in the centre of town. All members are volunteers from outside the parish, travelling in from as far afield as Guildford. Master of the Music Paul Stubblings describes the set-up as a halfway house for those who want to sing for fun yet be stretched to professional standards. The attraction is obvious: the social life, the appeal of James Gibbs' architecture, the historical associations—Handel played the organ and Mozart is reputed to have performed here—and the chance to sing music of a quality few suburban churches could provide.

For the listener, too, St Martin's would seem to provide something of a halfway house. The music standards may be high, but the atmosphere is relaxed. Stubblings has instigated the regular performance of Bach cantatas as an inducement to non-churchgoers seeking something sacred outside the formal setting of mass. He says the appeal is for those who

want a sense of the traditional with a flavour of something new, to which end he has recently commissioned a work by Arvo Part. "We try to keep up with liturgical trends, but certainly haven't gone down the pop music road."

The low residential population means few would see St Martin's as their parish church. Equally, those demographics mean that there are few children's choirs in central London. Regrettably, young participants tend to come from the middle classes. John Harper sees this as a trend of the modern era. "It is partly due to the lack of engagement with the churches of families in commercial centres, as well as the breakdown of links between church and schools. Many a music teacher in the past ran the local choir and encouraged pupils to sing in them. Teachers are now too busy to take on these responsibilities, and few parishes want to."

Southwark Cathedral stands as a rather proud exception to this. Whereas, for instance, St Paul's and Westminster Abbey and Cathedral run choir schools for boarding boy choristers, none exists at Southwark. This, according to the Dean, the Very Reverend Colin Slee, has required forging strong links with schools in the diocese to attract choristers.

Although a number of the choristers in both girl and boy choirs come from state schools or live in local authority accommodation, it would be stretching it to see Southwark as an outpost of egalitarianism within the ranks of staunchly middle-class Anglicanism. Rather, Colin Slee sees it as striving for a balance between state and private schools, and it is unique in London in offering musical training to day-school pupils of both sexes. Furthermore, the cathedral's efforts have bucked national trends by boasting about six candidates for every place in the boys' choir. At Westminster Cathedral and St Paul's, though the schools are currently full, there are fears that numbers will deplete in time due to the reluctance of today's parents to send their children to boarding school. This undercuts the financial security of the schools and reduces the likelihood of establishing equivalent girls' choirs.

When it comes to choral music there is no doubt that cathedrals lead the vanguard for quality, and requirements are exacting. As Colin Slee says: "We ask for a totally professional standard of excellence from our choristers, with no concessions. In fact, we tell them that they are professionals, and must behave as such."

Excellence and discipline: old-fashioned requirements not much trumpeted in New Britain. In fact, a war of words over church music has been waged between traditionalists and innovators for decades. Indeed, the debate over what church music actually is goes back even further.

Back in the 40s, one critic complained of the unleashing of "Vaughan Williams' 'Jas Gawronski' in church. His crime had been to adapt a number of folk tunes to perform as hymns—many of which have become much-loved standards. Earlier, Handel's great oratorios looked to entertain as much as to inspire devotion, but when the Messiah was first performed in London in 1743, the response was ambivalent: some considering it sacred music being performed in front of profane, theatre-going types. John Wesley saw easy-on-the-ear popular tunes as a means of attracting the masses to services, but the Tractarians in the 19th century believed church music must convey a sense of the spiritual. The choir at its specially commissioned church, All Saints, Margaret Street, maintains an estimably high standard of performance to this day.

It is easy to present a similar contemporary divide between those who see church music as a matter of preserving integrity, and those seeking to make the church "relevant" to the young, between staid conservatives and the happy-clappers exhorting

everyone to chill out. But opinions are not really that ossified, and there seems to be an acceptance that there is no one right way. As John Harper says: "I am not sure that there is a common denominator in music for worship. There has been a considerable diversification in the way people worship, and that affects the music they use in style and content."

No one really looks to cathedrals for innovation; rather, in Colin Slee's words, they are about "maintaining certain traditions, about giving people certainty". Perhaps it is wrong in any case to talk about modern and old, and we should rather speak in terms of content. As Colin Slee says of his own experience, where there is excellence of music, people will always come. Surely, ultimately, it is about being sincere in what you do? Thus, Gospel-style exhortations seem right in a Pentecostal church with a largely African-Caribbean congregation since they are so patently linked to culture, yet may seem strained in an Anglican or Catholic church trying to spray on a hip gloss to the liturgy with a tambourine and a guitar.

The largest London choirs expend considerable resources on reaching beyond their traditional constituency. St Martin-in-the-Fields' choir, for instance, recently went to South Africa and included a workshop in a township as part of their programme. St Paul's Cathedral Choir travelled to New York last June and spent time at St Thomas, Fifth Avenue, one of the few choir schools in North America—itself a reminder of the near uniqueness of choir schools to England.

Domestically, there has been much output in the broadcasting and recording fields. Westminster Cathedral choir won a Gramophone Recording of the Year award in 1998 for masses by Frank Martin and Ildarbrando Pizzetti, and distinguished the First Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall with Mahler's Eighth Symphony. St Paul's stages a Festival of the Sons of the Clergy each year, the oldest event of its kind dating back to 1655, which choirs from around the country are invited to join. Its Advent performances of the Messiah and, in Holy Week, of Bach's Passion provide more chances to hear the choir outside its more formal liturgical settings.

One of the most successfully "marketed" areas of church choral music has been Gregorian chant or, more simply, plainchant. Its appeal is obvious, with its timeless, mystical quality. Yet live performance can be hard to come by. Peter Wilton is Director of Music for The Gregorian Association,

London's wide and flourishing choice of choral music owes much to the large number of young singers—many of whom travel in to central London—who provide a pool of talent.

and has an encyclopedic knowledge of the subject. He runs a weekly class at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Farm Street, Mayfair, where chant can be regularly heard, and offers tuition for choirs who wish to learn or improve their plainchant skills. He says people can be put off by its supposed complexity, when in fact many chants are simple enough to be grasped by untrained parish choirs. The irony, he says, is that Anglicans tend to perform it rather better than its Roman Catholic originators these days. "Catholicism has undergone an ideological rejection since Vatican II, where rational verbal meaning is all-important. Non-verbal worship is seen as non-rational and they believe liturgical singing has to be performed by everyone. They fail to see that there have always been plainchants so the whole congregation can join in singing."

The great Catholic exceptions are the London Oratory and Westminster Cathedral. Martin Baker, Master of Music at the latter, takes an unabashedly traditionalist line, and his interpretation of Vatican II is different from that sketched by



Westminster Abbey's 36 choristers, above, all hold scholarships of its Choir School—the only school in England dedicated entirely to the education of choir boys. Southwark Cathedral is unique in that both its boy and girl choristers, right, are offered musical training, despite the fact that they are regular school-goers. During Advent, St Paul's Cathedral Choir, centre right, perform the Messiah away from the Cathedral's more formal surroundings. In 1998, Westminster Cathedral Choir, far right, won the coveted Gramophone Recording of the Year award, the first time it has ever been won by a choir. Southwark Cathedral, following page, holds its Christmas Choir Concert on December 15—the ideal opportunity to hear London's only cathedral girls' choir.



Peter Wilton. "Many people took Vatican II to be anti-Latin, but it actually remains the language of the Catholic Church; equally, Vatican II states that plainchant is of the utmost importance. Some 99 per cent of what we sing is Latin, and many who jumped on the bandwagon after Vatican II would say we are out of date. But among younger clergy members there is a discernible swing back in favour of Latin."

Realistically, music of the established church will never enter the mainstream. As Peter Wilton says, Gregorian is a functional music form, with limited commercial potential. But the difficulty of connecting runs deeper than that—the problem lies partly in the structure of Western society. John Harper speaks of the "growing philosophical, intellectual and cultural divide" between the Church and the secular world, contrasting it with the revived interest in the Orthodox Church, which has remained resistant to cultural influence and intervention. "Ironically, it is the Western Church that has responded to, and interacted with, contemporary culture and now finds itself in the weaker position." But how do you connect with a society that for the Christmas period suddenly sees all things "churchy" as part of the festive fun, while screwing its face up at the same things for the rest of the year?

John Scott, Director of Music at St Paul's, recognises the dilemma. "There is a great feeling of cathedral music belonging to a tradition stretching back to the Middle Ages, in that modern cathedral choirs have their origins in the singing of the daily offices by communities of monks. But if it is to survive, it has to be constantly re-examined and renewed." To this end he welcomes the contributions of modern composers such as John Tavener and Jonathan Harvey.

The links that once welded Church and society together remain strong in African-Caribbean culture, and the proportion of under 40s attending black-led churches, such as Pentecostal or Church of God, are such that the established Church can only watch with envy. Most of these have gospel choirs, making around 100 in the London area, and there are also community choirs dedicated to spreading the word of the Gospel beyond those who attend church.

Among them is the Seventh Day Advent Choir (SDA Choir), based in Croydon, and a familiar attraction at such arenas as the Royal Albert Hall. Its penchant is for classical arrangements, but it is clear that the basic appeal of gospel is its spontaneity, simplicity and, above all, its mutability. As Ken Burton, musical director of the SDA Choir, says: "Gospel is not restricted to any particular musical form; it's basically any music about God or elements of the Bible." A modern-day gospel concert might range from adaptations of popular songs into hymns, to elements of hip hop, rap and jazz fusion. "You can put on a gospel record," says Burton, "and find it impossible to tell the gospel from the soul." Its appeal to the young can be easily understood when a gospel event held at Mile End Stadium in August included, alongside the London Community Gospel Choir, such young talents of the burgeoning R&B scene as Kele Le Roc.

It has to be admitted that the most innovative contemporary composers, the modern day Bachs and Handels, tend not to invest their energies in sacred music. But, says John Scott, "you only have to sample the vast quantities of CDs made by choirs in the last decade to confirm that standards are higher than ever. And the recent popularity of 'spiritual minimalist' composers such as Tavener, Part and Gorecki is evidence of people seeking some spiritual dimension to their lives." Spiritual, substantial, free of gimmickry; that, in essence, is what London choral music is and we can be thankful for it.

JACK WATKINS writes on conservation, arts and travel for a number of national magazines and newspapers, including the *Independent* and the *Evening Standard*.



Christmas performances

St Paul's Cathedral

Nov 22, 11am: The Festival of St Cecilia, a yearly festival involving the choirs of St Paul's, Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral. Tickets are available (free of charge) from the Musicians Benevolent Fund on 020 7636 9106. The three choirs take turns to host the event, which includes performances of works by Bach and Stainer, plus Thomas Tallis' monumental motet in 40 vocal parts, *Spem in alium*, and a newly commissioned work by Roxanna Panufnik.

Dec 22, 1.15pm: The choristers of St Paul's perform Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*.

Croydon Seventh Day Advent Choir

Dec 23, 11.15am: A Music Day will be held at the Croydon Seventh Day Adventist Church, 95 Selhurst Road, South Norwood. The music will be led by the SDA, with lots of lively congregational singing. The SDA is one of the finest of London's Gospel choirs—regular performers on *Songs of Praise*—and there will be few better opportunities to sample live gospel music over the Christmas period than this. (No tickets required).

Westminster Cathedral

Dec 21, 7.30pm: The Christmas

Celebration. The Westminster Cathedral Choir performs a programme of music and readings, together with an orchestra. Tickets are available from the cathedral office.

Dec 24, 3pm: The First Vespers of Christmas. Performed entirely in Latin, this is a meditative event, unique to the Catholic Church. The Cathedral Choir sings plainsong hymns and prayers, canticles and antiphons and a polyphonic motet. The choir has acquired a worldwide reputation for its performances of Gregorian chant, and this occasion is a fine opportunity to hear it.

St Martin-in-the-Fields

Dec 7, 6.15pm: The choir sings carols around the Norwegian fir tree in Trafalgar Square. The Mayor of Oslo will be in attendance.
Dec 25, 9am: The Christmas service is a sung mass that will be receiving live transmission on BBC Radio 4.

Southwark Cathedral

15th Dec, 7.30pm: Cathedral Choir Concert, followed by a reception. The chance to hear London's only cathedral girls' choir. Tickets £12. Tel: 020 7367 6703.
17 Dec, 6.30: Cathedral Service, Lessons & Carols.



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Leipziger Weihnachtsbaum 1900



Leipziger Weihnachtsbaum 1908

The first photograph in the Wagners' collection, in 1900, far left, sees them sitting in front of a lovingly decorated tree with their cat and a modest array of presents, including fruits, home-made gingerbread and a photograph album for Richard Wagner.

Left, eight years later, despite the depressed economic situation, the Wagners exchanged especially lavish presents. Anna received a new jacket to match her lace blouse and skirt, and a hat, which was richly decorated with a silk scarf.



Weihnachten 1912



Weihnachten 1915

In 1912, a year that had seen flourishing trade and increased industrial growth in Berlin, the Wagners exchanged some expensive gifts, far left. Anna Wagner proudly shows off her new mangle, a coffee grinder, a carpet-sweeper and a book on housekeeping.

1915's image reflects the deprivation being suffered by Berliners after two winters at war, left. The Wagners used the map in the background to mark troop movements. The previous year, maps such as this one were the latest Christmas attraction.

PAST & PRESENTS...

TO MARK CHRISTMAS 1900, a newly-wed German couple photographed themselves beside their Christmas tree, their presents spread on the table between them. This image was to form the start of a chronicle of their lives. Every Christmas from then on, until the mid-40s, they continued what was to become an annual ritual, posing together for a picture in their home. In addition to an intimate memoir of two people's lives, they have left behind a unique document that records social and political changes over more than 40 years.

The ordered world of Berlin civil servant Richard Wagner and his wife Anna can be glimpsed through this collection of

photographs that nevertheless shows how a relatively well-to-do couple were affected by war and the Depression. When times were good they treated themselves to the latest innovations; when even the basics grew scarce they wrapped up against the cold and pared down their festive table. But somehow Wagner, a keen amateur photographer, always found a way to keep his camera equipment up to date, experimenting with the latest models and techniques.

The couple's photographs were taken as Christmas cards, which they sent to their friends. As such, Richard Wagner went to great lengths in their composition, altering the

Christmas for the Wagners in 1917 was cold, right. It was a white Christmas, and fuel had to be saved wherever possible. Both coal and other fuels were strictly rationed, so they had no choice but to wear their coats in the house to keep warm.

1927 saw the widespread use of electrical goods in the household. Far right, that Christmas, Anna received a Hoover and a stand for her iron—last year's gift from Richard—and the tree was lit for the first time with electric lights.



Weihnachten 1917 bei Kohlenmangel



Weihnachten 1927

The Wagners displayed only their newest purchases in 1937's photograph, right, which included a bread cutter. By 1937, most Berliners owned a radio similar to the one in the picture—during Christmas listeners all over the city would tune in to popular shows.

1942 saw the Wagners facing their fourth Christmas of World War II, and presents to each other were meagre, far right. That year, the manufacture of festive goods had been replaced by that of ammunition boxes and military insignia.



Weihnachten 1937



Weihnachten 1942

arrangement and setting, and trying out ingenious new ways of hiding the shutter release (activated by his wife). Some things, however, never changed. During five decades of marriage, the living room furniture remained almost exactly the same—typical of an era when it was designed to last a lifetime.

The presents on display reveal this middle-class couple's sober approach to life. Most are utility items such as household goods and clothes; rarely do they allow themselves a touch of frivolity such as a bottle of eau de Cologne or jewellery. Likewise, the Wagners themselves always appear wearing sensible clothing: a well-cut suit complete with waistcoat, a high-necked blouse worn with a demure skirt.

The Wagners remained childless, and their cat, Mietz, appears to have played an important role in their lives. There is something of an enigma over how the photographs came to be preserved: they were in the possession of another family who had mistakenly believed them to be their own relatives. They came to light when a Berlin museum decided to mount an exhibition of Christmas photographs and put a request for contributions in the press.

Weakened by the privations of World War II, Anna died in 1945 and her husband in 1950. They left behind a celebration of four decades of German Christmases—a festival they relished and which formed a focal point for each passing year. ►



Bruce Oldfield, fashion designer

Several months ago, I visited the Royal College end-of-year show, where I bought some pottery by Anja Lubach MA RSA. I only opened the package the other day because I've just moved house, and I didn't want to unwrap the pots until I had a place to put them. Sometimes you buy something and you get it home, take it out and think, "Oh my God, why did I buy that?" I was worried about these pots because they'd been sitting in their box for such a long time. But I was thrilled when I eventually took them out—they are absolutely gorgeous.

They are beautiful porcelain pots—very classical and pure—with no ornamentation at all. They are dark blue with a bright, white rim because that's the colour of the porcelain showing through, which is matt. She has obviously thrown them on a wheel and then just pushed them—which makes them seem as though they are leaning. The effect is very gentle, peaceful and calming. Because the rims aren't symmetrical, they are full of interest, whichever angle you look at them from.

We all thought that by the year 2000 everything would be generated in an extremely hi-tech manner by computers, popped out of an assembly line or from some pre-formed plastic pod. We imagined that no one would appreciate the relevance of something actually made by hand. But to me, these pots—which are functional, yet beautiful—have extraordinary integrity. They are the perfect representation of 2000 in so far as they are a celebration of craft.

A major retrospective, Bruce Oldfield: Fashion Designs 1973-2000, is currently showing at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle until December 31.



...PRESENTS & FUTURE

Inspired by the photographs of Richard and Anna Wagner's Christmas presents, which have become a record of their time, we ask a selection of personalities which items they would choose to place beside their tree at Christmas 2000. Interviews by Rosanna Greenstreet.



Shebah Ronay, broadcaster and actress

I would love something that manages to look good, while remaining functional. In a world where everything is becoming increasingly impersonal and uniform, I love the originality of the VW New Beetle.

Despite echoes of the old 30s' shape, it's the only car on the road that looks distinctly futuristic. It's more animal than machine and appears to have its own personality. I always smile when I see somebody driving one past, and have seen others walk into lamp-posts while being captivated by this friendly car.

It appears to be the first car designed with a girl in mind. There are loads of gadgets inside, including such essentials as the dashboard flower vase and the sunglasses holder. Having said that, I have also spotted builders taking a keen interest, so it can't be just an aesthetic factor. The New Beetle achieves a balance, with its classically designed body housing an engine that is apparently packed full of the latest technology. Perhaps if someone were to send me such a gift, they could also include a driver to complete the package.



Anne McKevitt, interior designer

I definitely want one of those little silver scooters. I've been pestering my husband about them for the last month, in the hope that he will eventually buy me one. To me, a scooter is the perfect present for 2000: it's obvious that traffic in London is grinding to a halt. We are actually travelling at the same speed as we did 110 years ago, when people got around by horse and carriage.

I've tried out two manual scooters—I prefer them to the ones with little motors. At least you can do some exercise and work up a bit of a sweat. One of them, decorated in a combat khaki, a friend had bought in New York—but you can get them here for about £150. All you have to do is stand on them and do what you did when you were seven years old! I think it's amazing how many you see around town. Over the last two or three months they have started to pop up almost everywhere.

The great thing is that you can ride a scooter on the pavement. I know there has been a debate about the ones that are motorised (they look exactly the same but have a tiny lawnmower motor attached). Some people believe that you shouldn't use them on the pavement and that you should pay road tax.

I think scooters are the way to go. They're definitely the best way to get up and down Oxford Street! In New York, many people use roller skates, but taking them on and off is much more awkward. I think a scooter is far easier to handle; you can hop on and off whenever you want. Even better, you can collapse it, pick it up and take it on the tube or into the office.

Anne McKevitt has presented numerous television programmes, including the BBC's Home Front. Her range of products for the home is called Anne McKevitt Ideas.



Jim Crace, novelist

What would I like for Christmas? Two dozen garden-quality fish, please. We were woken at dawn at the end of August by protesting magpies to discover a heron standing in the middle of our little pond. Feeding. By the time I'd run naked into the garden, flapping my arms while the departing bird performed its magic wing beats down the lawn, there was only one traumatised tiddler left. I had mixed feelings—inflated to lose the fish; touched and surprised that our large, but very urban, garden could warrant a visit from anything as wild and as murderous as a heron.

I would be grateful if these fish could be replaced this Christmas. Nothing pampered and neurotic like koi carp, thanks. Nothing flashy but invisible like orfe. Nothing needlessly decorous like shubunkins. I'd be happier with plain, sociable goldfish—the sort that idle on the surface of the water whenever I walk past the pond and are quick to thrash and squabble whenever I throw them food. They add a quiet, orange drama to the garden.

Freshwater fish, in fact, have almost become a traditional Christmas gift in our family. Both our children were keen fish lovers, and Christmas Eve was for many years a time for smuggling new, watery livestock into the house. At one time we had 13 tanks, all stocked with Christmas presents. Indeed, there are still three small tanks in my office containing third-generation guppies, catfish and cichlids that were reared by the children. These were presents that could not be broken on Boxing Day or forgotten within a week. What could be better than a gift that breeds?

So, my two dozen Christmas presents for the year 2000 will not only remind me of those living gifts and lively Christmases that we have shared with the children, but will also—herons permitting—be bright companions for the coming years.

Jim Crace's latest novel, *Being Dead*, is published in paperback by Penguin, price £6.99.



Renée Fleming, soprano

I would choose a piece of jewellery by Elizabeth Gage, whose work I really adore. Her pieces are perfect for a millennium gift: most of them are based on historical references, yet they are styled in a modern setting. These brave and courageous designs are absolutely unique, yet there is a story behind each one. For example, Elizabeth has recently made me some wonderful earrings—out of original 200AD coins! I like this feeling of bringing something with us into the new millennium, lest we forget.

I have recently commissioned a new ring from Elizabeth. The design is from a collection called Heliotrope, and it is elongated so that it covers my finger from knuckle to hand. It is made out of silver and white gold, and is inset with a beautiful, old peridot stone that has diamond accents either side. This bright-green stone captures the light superbly—I guess that's why it is named after the sun. It is distinctively contemporary, yet not at all flashy. The bold and stylish design makes a statement, but at the same time it is so delicately beautiful. I would like to think that it reflects me in some of the many roles I have performed over the past few years based on strong-charactered women—parts such as the Marschallin in *Der Rosenkavalier* or my role in Massenet's *Thaïs*. The Grammy award-winning soprano releases her new album, *Diva*, in January.



Perhaps the dramatic piece of furniture John Tusa is looking for is the Bajan Concorde table, below, by Danny Lane. Right, a ring from Elizabeth Gage's Heliotrope collection.



John Tusa, Managing Director of the Barbican

From time to time my wife and I will commission a piece of furniture. The process we go through of talking to the designer, expressing a vague set of needs and wishes, and then finding them translated into a thrilling reality quite beyond anything we could have imagined ourselves has been wonderfully rewarding. Having just moved into a new house, we need a new dining-room table.

Except that it mustn't be just any old dining-room table. It must be a fine piece, probably using metal and glass, possibly some wood, which for a good deal of the time will take a dramatic position in its own right in a largish, modern room. It must have enough personality for, say, a small piece of sculpture to stand on it, but it must be easily movable, adaptable in form, and not be so heavy that it represents a threat to the user's life and limb.

As the table will be a present from ourselves to ourselves, we won't need to wrap it. Another advantage is that we won't have to spend December asking one another what we want for Christmas. The Christmas tree—metal, with silver decorations—can stand on top. The only question is: how do we find the right designer? Any suggestions?

Dickie Bird, former Test umpire

For me, it has to be the 2000 *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*. I'm always on the lookout for Wisden books—old and new. I received my first as a gift when I began playing county cricket for Yorkshire aged 19. By now I've collected quite a few editions. They were initially published in the middle of the 19th century—I think 1864 was the first. That's going back a long way, and if you have the whole collection right through to 2000, they are worth a fortune. There are probably a few lucky people who have them all.

I love the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanacks* because you go right back in history, to when the game was first played. You have every detail—all the figures and everything there is to know about cricket. If I want to find out who got so many runs in what year and who won the county championship, then I go straight to Wisden.

The one Wisden which I really treasure is the 1997 edition. It was presented to me by the Cricket Writers Club for my services to cricket, and to the public. The book is beautiful—it has been bound in leather. Magnificent. *Dickie Bird's* book, *White Cap and Bails*, is published in paperback by Hodder & Stoughton, price £6.99.



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First journey for Sinai Treasures

Built in the sixth century, the Monastery of St Catherine in the barren wilderness of Sinai is home to a magnificent collection of holy icons, twelve of which are on show in London this winter.

IN A REMOTE valley in the Sinai desert, enclosed by towering mountains, the Monastery of St Catherine lies hidden in one of the most inhospitable environments on earth. Until comparatively recently it could be reached only by camel and received visitors by hauling them up and over its fortress-like walls in a basket. Since its founding by the Emperor Justinian between 548 and 565AD it has been a realm apart, its isolation ensuring its remarkable survival. Hidden within its warren of venerable buildings are Christendom's oldest functioning library, containing the world's richest collection of ancient manuscripts after that of the Vatican, and its greatest collection of early icons, some dating back to the sixth century.

Now, Londoners are privileged to gaze on some of the monastery's treasures, as 12 of its most revered icons have travelled to the Courtauld Gallery for an extraordinary exhibition. For all but one of these works, it is the first time that they have ever left St Catherine's. The earliest was painted in Constantinople in 1000AD and the remainder executed by artist-monks in Sinai in the 12th and 13th centuries. They are joined in London by eight further Byzantine icons lent from the Hermitage in St Petersburg. At the request of Sinai's Archbishop Damianos all are displayed within the Courtauld in a specially constructed church-like setting to give, as he describes it, "a religious, not an art gallery atmosphere".

The Monastery of St Catherine sits in one of the Christian world's most holy—and spectacular—sites, clinging to a bare, rocky slope in a desert valley in the shadow of Mount Sinai. Snow-capped in the winter, the mountain was aptly described by Procopius, court historian to Justinian, as "precipitous and terribly wild", adding "it is impossible for a man

Left, a 13th-century, double-sided icon depicting Sergios and Bacchos, early Christian military saints who were martyred in Syria. This page, the central doors into a Byzantine sanctuary were customarily decorated with the Annunciation, such as this late-12th-century example at St Catherine's: Mary listens to Gabriel's words, her distaff and spindle hanging idle.





to pass the night on its summit, since constant crashes of thunder and other terrifying manifestations of divine power are heard". It was on this wind-swept peak that Moses received the Ten Commandments, and within the monastery's precincts is a venerated shrub which, according to long-held tradition, is the Burning Bush. The roots of this unusual plant, said to be found nowhere else in the region, continue to sprout from beneath the chapel which was built in its name in the sixth century.

Despite its biblical associations and the raw beauty of its sweeping landscapes, the Sinai desert has endured an almost constant stream of conflicts since antiquity. Africa, Asia and Europe have long collided on this rugged peninsula wedged between the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, from the time of the Pharaohs to Lawrence of Arabia's classic camel-crossing in 1917. More recently, it has witnessed three Arab-Israeli wars, and was occupied by the Israelis in 1967 before being returned to Egypt in 1982.

The first monks began arriving in the area shortly after the beginning of the last millennium. Procopius observed: "On this Mount Sina [sic] live monks, whose life is a kind of careful rehearsal of death, and they enjoy without fear the solitude which is very precious to them." Living in hillside caves, the Fathers soon, however, found themselves vulnerable to attack. Through Justinian's patronage, the monastery's thick, red, granite walls were thrown up in defence, and a religious community established within.

Even so, following a visit to the monastery by the Prophet Muhammad, the monks were, in 620AD, forced to apply to Medina for protection. Owing to the generous hospitality he



enjoyed during his sojourn, the Prophet is said to have been moved to issue a firman confirming their rights: the original document remained at St Catherine's until 1517, when it was taken to Constantinople, where it remains today.

Originally dedicated to the Virgin, the monastery was renamed for St Catherine when the saint's bones were discovered in around 800AD, lying on the nearby summit of Sinai's highest mountain, where they were said to have been carried from Alexandria by an angel. Brought down to the monastery's church, they are now kept in ancient silver reliquaries in her tomb near the altar. Above the tomb hung the earliest known icon of the saint, painted in around 1200AD, showing her surrounded by scenes of her martyrdom. This important work is among the icons currently on show in London.

Other major pieces include two monumental works showing Moses receiving the tablets of stone, and Elijah fed by a raven. It is particularly moving to consider that these two events took place just a two-hour climb from the church where the icons normally hang. A flight of some 3,000 vertiginous steps hewn into the mountainside leads from the monastery to Elijah's basin, a lofty waterhole where ravens and other desert birds still gather in flocks. A further ascent brings the pilgrim to the summit of Mount Sinai itself, where a tiny church clings perilously to the rockface, with unforgettable views over distant peaks and wadis.

Further works on show in London include two screens of the Annunciation, which were opened and closed at key moments during Mass. They evoke the atmosphere of the church at the monastery, which has its own richly decorated iconostasis opening to the sanctuary. Dazzling sixth century

Above, St Catherine's Monastery has stood at the foot of Mount Sinai since the sixth century, during which time it has amassed a magnificent collection of more than 2,000 icons, most painted in egg tempera over a ground of fabric and gesso on wood.

Left, Elijah being fed by a raven, when in an act of faith he went into the wilderness at God's command. This icon dates from the 12th-13th centuries and the inscription below is a prayer by the artist, Stephanos, for his own redemption.

Right, a 13th-century double-sided processional icon, with Sergius and Bacchos on the reverse. The Mother of God is in the Hodegetria type, pointing to the Christ child. The icon is displayed in the exhibition so that both sides can be viewed.





mosaics of Christ, Moses and the saints, lit by chandeliers hung with ostrich eggs, sit high in the apse beyond.

That St Catherine's 2,000 icons are so well preserved is largely thanks to the monastery's remote location and dry climate. However, the recent journey west has posed conservation problems for the 12 now in London. They have, therefore, travelled and are displayed in climate-controlled cases with a humidity level of 20-27 per cent, compared to the 50-55 per cent level that is normal at the Courtauld Gallery.

St Catherine's cache of riches has long made it a Holy Grail for scholars; its very remoteness holds an allure for the adventurous traveller. Typical of the doughty visitors received over the years are the two Victorian ladies—Mrs Agnes Lewis and Mrs Margaret Gibson—who, as one of the Fathers explains: "Being British, arrived with their tea kettle," and used it to steam apart the impacted pages of one of St Catherine's greatest treasures, the Codex Syriacus. (Fortunately they took the utmost care, and the manuscript's corrugated leaves are now conserved in the monastery library.)

But since the first pilgrim—a Spanish noblewoman named Etheria—visited the hermit monks in the fifth century, there have been radical changes in Sinai. Today, ironically, the Courtauld exhibition may provide visitors with a more contemplative environment in which to view the icons than that of the monastery itself. In the 1960s, a metalled road and airstrip were built by the Israelis for strategic reasons. Now, over the last 10 years, has come the rapid development of the Red Sea "riviera" as a diving holiday resort served by charter flights. St Catherine's is the most popular day-trip destination and coach-loads of tourists flood the monastery's narrow alleyways between its opening hours of 9am and 12noon. Until the second half of the 20th century there were fewer than a dozen visitors a year; now the monastery may receive 2,000 in a single morning. They surge through the narthex of the sixth-century church, where dimly lit icons are displayed behind glass, their tour guides attempting to illuminate the works by torchlight as they are swept on by the human tide. Only when the belltower strikes 12, does the monastery slip back 1,500 years. The monks enter, one by one, and venerate the images before taking part in their midday service, watched over by their timeless saints.

The exemplary way in which the monks manage their visiting hordes sheds light on St Catherine's survival over the ages. Ever since the early days, they have struck a fine balance between their solitary devotions and the world outside. Their lives have always been inseparable from those of the Jabeliya bedouin who live just outside the walls and serve as guards and workers. Every Wednesday night this relationship is reinforced when they all gather together to bake the weekly batch of bread.

The monks of St Catherine's are all Greek Orthodox, but tolerance of other creeds and cultures is part of their way of life: there is even a mosque within the monastery, thought to have been hastily erected in the 11th century as a gesture to the religion of the surrounding area. Today, the monastery remains closed on Fridays as well as on Sundays (during the Israeli occupation, it closed on the Sabbath instead).

While some monks supervise the church, others pursue tasks around the monastery, or retreat for prayer and study. Most visible among them is Father Daniel, who, in addition to being the highly erudite guardian of the monastery's treasures, can be spotted sawing logs, driving a truck or issuing instructions via his mobile phone. At present the St Catherine's community consists of some 25 monks, all of Greek origin, except for one Father from Texas and a second from London.

From afternoon through to evening, peace returns to the desert once more. The Fathers are at prayer, and sunset turns



Left, a monumental icon, which possibly decorated a sanctuary screen in the monastery church. Dating from the 13th century, it depicts the Archangel Michael dressed in a tunic and carrying a sceptre. Above, a youthful Moses receives the Ten Commandments on the top of Mount Sinai. Painted by Stephanos, Moses is shown with feet bared, beside the Burning Bush.

the walls of the monastery a deep blush-pink. A single light glows half way up the mountain slope opposite Mount Sinai. It is the home of Father Moses who, for many years, has lived in isolation, in the tradition of the earliest monks, in his own rocky hermitage. As darkness falls, one feels what T E Lawrence described as the "silence of the night so intense that we turned round in the saddles at fancied noises away there by the cloak of stars".

Next February, when the icons are flown back to their desert home, will be a time of great rejoicing at the monastery. When the vehicles bringing them back from the airport are spotted driving up the valley from the desert plain, the church bells will ring out. Archbishop Damianos and his community of monks, all in black flowing robes and tall hats, will gather outside the monastery walls in a traditional gesture of greeting. Having shared their treasures with the world outside, it will be a great relief to return them to their regular niches—places the icons may never leave again for centuries to come.

BY ALISON BOOTH

□ Sinai, Byzantium, Russia: Icons at the Courtauld. Until February 4, 2001. For information, call 020 7848 2526. The exhibition was made possible by the London-based Saint Catherine Foundation, dedicated to the preservation of the monastery's ancient manuscripts, icons and monastic traditions. Work is currently underway on the major task of conserving the library. For further information on the Foundation, write to 14 Cleveland Row, London SW1A 1DP.



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[british museum]

The imminent opening of its breathtaking Great Court heralds a new era for the British Museum. Giles Worsley investigates how both this magnificent London landmark and other museums are actively reinventing themselves.

WITH ITS GRAND, Ionic façade rising majestically above the streets of Bloomsbury, the British Museum is one of the great museums of the world. It epitomises our image of the 19th-century museum: bold, confident, assertive. It is a monument to the Victorian belief that the world is an orderly, comprehensible place whose cultures can be analysed and dissected, to be studied by scholars and enjoyed by the masses.

Some would say it is the greatest museum in the world. It certainly claims more visitors—5.7 million a year—than the two most obvious rivals: the Louvre in Paris, with 5.1 million, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, with 5.3 million. But for years the grandeur of the museum's façade and the splendour of its collections have been in marked contrast to the dowdiness of its interior.

The trouble is that the British Museum has not been able to cope with its popularity. In the past, a visit entailed

squeezing past milling throngs of schoolchildren in the narrow entrance hall and navigating the labyrinthine corridors and staircases of the building, while chance played a greater part in deciding what you saw rather than design.

The British Museum was built for visitors in their thousands, not in their tens of thousands. In E M Forster's *Maurice*, the hero memorably makes an assignation with his lover in the British Museum, confident in the knowledge that they will not be disturbed. Global tourism and the rise of the museum as a visitor attraction and not just a temple to the arts has changed that, and the British Museum has found it hard to adapt.

The problem was that for years a cuckoo sat in the middle of the British Museum: the British Museum Reading Room, latterly known as the British Library. Originally, the British Museum was a shrine to all forms of culture,

BRITAIN IN A NEW LIGHT



Left, a computer-generated view of the British Museum's Great Court. The courtyard has been hidden from view since the 1850s, but will be opened to the public in December.

This page, the Great Court's cast portico is one of three surviving originals that have undergone repairs.



including natural history, which remained there until 1873 when it was gradually moved out to its own grand museum in South Kensington. Of course, this included books, and one side of the great quadrangle—designed for the museum by its original architect, Sir Robert Smirke—was given over to the King's Library. This great collection of books had been acquired by George III and was donated to the nation after his death in 1820 by his son George IV.

Books have an inexorable habit of growing in number. The King's Library soon proved insufficient, and the decision was made to place a circular reading room in the centre of Smirke's handsome quadrangle, which was to be surrounded with stacks or bookshelves. In so doing, the sense of spaciousness and flexibility that Smirke had built into his building was destroyed instantly, and the British Museum has struggled with the problem ever since.

Finally, the British Library moved out to new quarters at St Pancras. The way was open to resolve the museum's difficulties, and the key was the clever adaptation of the central courtyard. After an international competition, the commission was given to Lord Foster in 1994, with a clever scheme to strip everything out of the courtyard except the book stacks and then roof it in glass to create a great central hall, to be known as the Queen Elizabeth II Great Court. The total cost of the project was to be just under £100 million.

At a stroke, the museum's circulation problems have been resolved. The current entrance hall, where visitors had spent so long struggling to orientate themselves, has simply become an ante-room through which they pass. Orientation is now easier, and it is no longer necessary to navigate long galleries and tortuous corridors to get from one end of the building to the other because everything revolves around the central courtyard. The clarity and lucidity that were inherent in Smirke's original plan have been unlocked.

Nor is this all—and for £100 million it is true that one expects more than simply improved circulation. For years the museum has suffered from lack of space. Its ethnographic collections, for example, were sent off to the Museum of Mankind in Piccadilly in an attempt to create more room, and despite having a quarter of a million schoolchildren visiting each year, there were no dedicated facilities to cope with them.

All this has been addressed in the work. Two auditoriums, one of them seating 320, and a young visitors' centre have been created in the Clore Education Centre, which has been excavated beneath the floor of the courtyard. The ethnographic collections have returned and are now housed in a series of new galleries that include the Mexican Gallery, the Chase Manhattan Gallery of North America, Sainsbury African Galleries and the Wellcome Gallery of Ethnography, which is due to open in 2003.

In the middle of the building lies the restored reading room, now known as the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Centre. Books, it is good to say, remain at the heart of culture—at least in the British Museum's eyes. Paul Hamlyn has donated 25,000 books to create a study library for the museum's collections, which will be open to all visitors. The reading room will also house a new, computerised information system called COMPASS, which will provide an alternative way to explore the museum's collections.

Coming across the reading room in the centre of the courtyard, framed by Lord Foster's wonderful curving glass roof, is a glorious and breathtaking surprise. Until now it has always been hidden away among the stacks, a building with no exterior façade. Foster has clad it with stone, and it sits like a shrine in the courtyard. The old desks at which Karl Marx and a host of 19th-century luminaries worked are still intact, but the room's dowdy charm



The curving glass roof of the Great Court, above, frames the dome of the reading room. The spectacular roof covers an area of 6,000m², comprises 3,300 individual pieces of glass and is supported by 12km of steel.

has been replaced by a sparkle it has not known for a century thanks to the restoration of the original, pale-blue-and-gilt decoration.

This careful restoration of the reading room's original decoration and the reinstatement of the courtyard's south portico—which was removed to extend the entrance hall in 1875—mark a revolution in attitudes towards the building. This can also be seen in the restoration of the original, polychromatic colour scheme of the entrance hall, now known as the Weston Great Hall. When this was completed in 1847 it represented the latest in scholarly appreciation of Greek architecture. Far from Greek buildings being the white marble images that we now see, scholars had come to realise that they were originally brightly painted. Leonard Collman's decoration, which used over 65 colours, was a careful attempt to recapture that effect.

Collman's scheme survived until the 1920s when it was painted out. The area suffered bomb damage during World War II—after repairs the entrance hall was decorated in battleship grey up until the mid-90s, when the development of the Great Court provided an opportunity for restoration. Enough of the original paint was found to survive under later layers to enable specialists to analyse pattern and colour. Collman's watercolour of his scheme, which the museum had acquired in 1902, proved to be an essential reference during the reinstatement of the 1847 polychromatic



Right, a terracotta water vessel that will be part of the Great Court's ambitious opening exhibition which will run from December 7, 2000 to February 11, 2001. Entitled *The Human Image*, the exhibition will examine representations of the human form and will include pieces drawn from the museum's entire collection. Both the entrance hall, top, and the reading room, above, have been restored to their original decorative splendour.

decoration, which was successfully completed in June this year by a team of up to 12 sign painters, using signwriting techniques.

The change in attitude seen at the British Museum is symptomatic of a broader shift in opinion towards museum buildings. For much of the second half of the 20th century, curators at the British Museum and the other great Victorian museums struggled against the buildings they had inherited. Original spaces were carved up, decoration destroyed, and new additions made in discordant styles. Today, at the British Museum and elsewhere, curators are rediscovering the virtues of the buildings they occupy, and are learning to work with, rather than against, them. That is what makes Norman Foster's Great Court scheme so successful—it is a logical development of the original building.

The transformation of the British Museum is the largest and most public example of a new attitude towards the 19th-century museum, but its importance has been obscured by the excitement that has surrounded the opening of Tate Modern. Despite the success of Tate Modern, the most significant development in this remarkable museum year has not been the opening of new museums but the transformation of our great 19th-century museums.

Rick Mather's work at the Wallace Collection and the Dulwich Picture Gallery exemplifies the trend on a small scale. Both were well-loved museums with outstanding collections, but both suffered from major problems. Their galleries were impressive but run-down, and the supporting facilities—which are considered essential to unlock the potential a museum holds—were sadly lacking.

In both cases a new restaurant, lecture theatre and education room have been added, along with all the new technology and services required today. But in both cases the new work has been grafted on to the existing building, accompanied by restoration campaigns that are aimed at recapturing the original feel of the two galleries. At the Wallace this is the impression of a grand London house; at



Dulwich, Sir John Soane's pioneering art gallery. What has happened at the British Museum is simply the same trend only on a massive scale.

Nor are these museums alone. Earlier this year, the National Gallery announced a long-term master plan. For 15 years the National Gallery has been carefully restoring its galleries, stripping out the insensitive alterations of the 60s and 70s and putting back the wood floors, fabric hangings and polychrome decoration. The result is thrilling—a museum that looks truly stunning.

But the National Gallery also suffers from the British Museum's old problem: its building cannot cope with its popularity. The entrance hall is too small and the visitor facilities are insufficient. Now the National Gallery is about to begin transforming its ground floor, creating a new restaurant, shop and entrance opening directly on to Trafalgar Square. As funds become available, this transformation will spread across the ground floor, opening up areas never before seen by the public.

That this is possible is thanks to an impressive coup: the purchase of St Vincent House—now largely used as a hotel—which lies behind the museum on St Martin's Street. This has allowed staff to be moved into the house, freeing up space in the main building. The National Gallery's long-term aim is to demolish St Vincent House and replace it with a specially designed suite of major exhibition rooms.

Much the same approach can be seen in Manchester, where Michael Hopkins and Partners is currently building a new extension for the Manchester City Art Gallery, which will greatly enhance this fine museum. One could also point to Tate Britain, the former Tate Gallery at Millbank, where John Miller and Partners has been overseeing the creation of major new galleries, improved visitor facilities and a new entrance that is due to open next year.

Museums are popular as never before. Far from being the elitist preserves of some government ministers' imaginations, they reach an audience that the museums' founders could never have conceived. The qualities of the buildings themselves are being rediscovered. No one entering the British Museum through the Weston Great Hall, passing through the central courtyard and seeing the reading room could fail to be impressed.

Museum curators at the British Museum, quite as much as the Wallace Collection and the Dulwich Picture Gallery, have come to realise that the buildings used to house their great collections are in many ways the prime exhibit within those collections, and are treating them with the respect they deserve. Nothing, after all, could epitomise more succinctly the British attitude towards the world's cultures in the 19th and 20th centuries than the British Museum.

The change in attitude also marks a new realism. We already have superb collections in this country, and wonderful buildings in which to display them, it is just that for too long the buildings have been neglected, and no one has had the money to provide the facilities needed to make the best of these collections. To unlock the pleasure and interest embodied in our national museums needs more than just gallery space, and it is this realisation that marks the transformation of the British Museum, and of so many of our great national collections.

GILES WORSLEY is the Architecture Correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* and a trustee of Somerset House, which opened to the public earlier this year.

It's Christmas-time again, but what do you buy the person who has everything? Why not try a new experience—Lucia van der Post investigates.

A little luxury learning

ROUND ABOUT CHRISTMAS time a group of "difficult people" rear their heads. They are the ones responsible for the shoppers with furrowed brows that can be spotted desperately scouring the "gift suggestions" departments of the major stores late on Christmas Eve. There isn't a family without at least one and we all have trouble with them—these are the non-consumers. Sometimes they seem to have almost no material needs because their tastes are so austere and ascetic that, no matter how venerable the vintage or soft the cashmere, it's hard to interest them in a mere possession. Sometimes it's because their tastes are so peculiar and idiosyncratic that only somebody with access to the deepest recesses of their mind can get it right. And sometimes it's quite simply because they have almost everything already. Welcome to our old friend: the man—or, indeed, woman—who has everything.

"What would you like for Christmas this year?" you ask of such people some time in October. "Oh, don't bother about me," they say, "a book, a tie, some socks...anything." It makes them sound so undemanding but in fact they cause more angst than all the eager consumers put together. The answer has to be—give them an experience. Only the dullest or the most seriously depressed run out of the desire to experience something new. Try an introduction to a new pastime, a hobby, an area of expertise, a little light learning. The festive season is certainly not the time to commit any of your nearest and dearest to three-year-long explorations of Tibetan culture or the nuances of Icelandic sagas, so keep it relatively short—perhaps centred around a weekend, a day or even an evening away—make sure it's fun as well as informative and, if possible, add a dollop of luxury to make it even more celebratory.

For those who love their wine, and believe that the more one knows about this subject the better, tutored wine tastings combine much pleasure with agreeable learning (the theory being that if you improve your knowledge you can easily raise the quality of your drinking while reducing your outlay). In London, many of the grand hotels and some of the more enterprising restaurants are starting to organise tutored tastings or wine courses so that customers can enjoy the food and learn a little as they go along. At Isola, Bruno Loubet's Knightbridge restaurant, which has both interesting, innovative food and a fantastic list of some 300 Italian wines, there is now a chance to go on one of its Cellar Tours to learn more

Right, Red Letter Day's vintage stunt flying trips in a Tiger Moth, the plane used to train Battle of Britain pilots, are definitely for those with nerves of steel. Far right, Michael Schuster's wine-tasting courses impart expert knowledge in intimate surroundings.



about the wines. There are three sample tours on offer—all accompanied by one of the house sommeliers. This being the season of warmth, generosity, and celebration we'll focus on the Gourmet tour—"the great and the good" as Isola dubs it. This tutored tasting offers the chance to sample the more distinguished and rare wines in the cellar. Or, for those fond of cooking, Bruno Loubet's once-a-month cookery classes, each with no more than eight pupils to a class, are inspirational. On the first Saturday of the month, starting at 9am, Bruno Loubet himself talks the class through the dishes to be prepared, and this is then followed by action in the kitchen. The tedious preparation work is all done and the pupils can concentrate on whichever aspect of Italian cooking Loubet is expounding on that day—whether pasta, truffles or other Italian delights. Great for the cook—and great for the cook's partner, not to mention their friends and family.

A tutored wine tasting at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, the grand old country house that Lord Jacob Rothschild runs on behalf of The National Trust, is both a great way to learn about wines from Bordeaux and a seriously fun day out. Visiting Americans, young dot.com entrepreneurs, civil servants wanting to know more about wine, all seem to find such days deliciously life-enhancing and the sense of purpose seems to add to the enjoyment.

During this thoroughly cultured day out—champagne and lunch in the beautifully restored old dairy are included—some eight serious wines are tasted. The morning starts with a tour of the Rothschild cellars, and a professional introduction as to how to judge the wines' colour, smell and taste. It all turns out to be an infinitely more complex matter than one had ever supposed. Tasting notes are taken, and questions asked: it would be hard to slack when such serious professionalism is brought to bear on the matter. Following lunch there is a chance to tour the house and gardens.

If you think that the single day is too simplistic a gift, then there could scarcely be a more agreeable way to learn more about wine than to attend one of Michael Schuster's six evening courses. Once a week for six sessions, Schuster hosts a private tasting of some 40 different wines in his own home in north London. About 20 people attend each tasting and the advice is so good that some professionals go along from time to time to hone their skills. Each series centres on particular varieties or countries—for instance one could focus on dry white wines from Italy and France, or on red wines



mainly from Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rioja and Piedmont. To make it more festive the "ticket" for the course comes in an attractive package with a wine-related card.

Then there is FireBird, the grand and sumptuous new Russian restaurant in London's Conduit Street, which offers tutored tastings of caviar and vodka on special evenings. What could be more indulgent than to have a chance to taste the one against the other? Everything is beautifully presented, the caviar in silver dishes and the vodka in small, frozen glasses. You come away with far more than an insight into the esoteric world of Russian drinks (did you know that one variety of vodka is flavoured with cucumber?), but with a sense of what it must have been like to have lived in pre-revolutionary Russia that leaves you longing to know more about its culture and history. Continuing the theme of spirits, Claridge's bar manager, Paulo Loureiro, holds Saturday cocktail-making courses. You start with tea and coffee, end with a light lunch and you go away with a cocktail shaker.

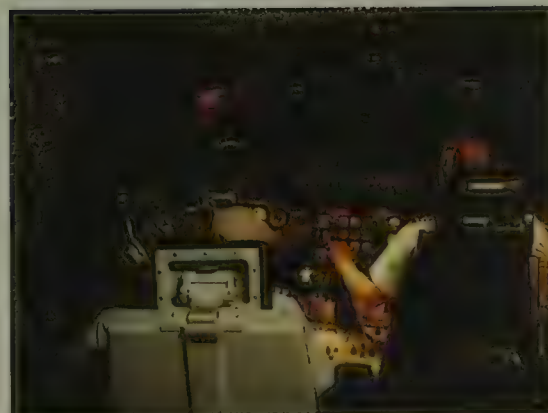
There may be some for whom learning about food and wine is old hat: what they crave is excitement. Age need be no barrier—one 90 year old of my acquaintance wanted a flight in a microlight for his birthday. Red Letter Days is a company that specialises in the great adrenalin rush, the one-off exciting day—spent, for instance, out racing on a Formula One track (with instruction, of course, provided). If you're unsure as to whether flying would thrill your best-beloved, however, you might start by offering a day's tuition in a flight simulator.

Then there are flowers—there's scarcely a more upwardly mobile arena. Once it was a fairly standard, if elaborate, matter. You followed the school of Constance Spry or Pulbrook & Gould and that was that. These days the nuances of floristry are infinitely more complex and they change as fast as the winds of fashion. Kenneth Turner is the man to make sure that whatever you do with your flowers won't fix you in the floral equivalent of polyester land. He runs a range of courses—from one to five days—in a pretty townhouse in

Above left, the National Trust's Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire hosts one-day courses specialising in the wines of Bordeaux, including a champagne lunch and a tour of the house and gardens.

Top right, the hydraulic flight simulators used by Red Letter Days exactly replicate the flight deck of a real aircraft and are identical to those used to train airline pilots.

Above right, Sotheby's Institute of Art runs a number of evening courses, such as Old Master prints, which are practical as well as educational.



the centre of London, and each specialises in fresh, dried or particularly seasonal arrangements. If you can, try to book one with Kenneth Turner himself—although his assistants teach in a wonderfully helpful way, he has an exceptionally fine line in amusing anecdotes.

On the opposite side of the city, overlooking Hackney's Victoria Park, is the ultra-fashionable McQueens. A favourite of the fashion and media industries, this is the place for throwing away the rule book and pushing flowers way beyond their accepted limits. If you want to let your imagination run riot, a one-day private lesson with co-founder Ercole Moroni is the ultimate gift—the opportunity to develop style and dexterity, using unexpected materials in exciting ways. Alternatively, group courses from one intensive day to one, two or four weeks are also available. And if, while choosing a course as a present, you are tempted to treat yourself, there are a number of one-day courses in November teaching everything you might care to learn about Christmas arrangements, spanning topiary, wreaths, garlands, hand-tied bouquets and fruit and vegetable displays.

Those who want to know more about gardening should consider The English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden. Its well-known, one-year diploma courses are for the seriously green-fingered rather than those seeking a fun day out. But there are also shorter courses—Planting in Pots and Containers, for instance, or the New Kitchen Garden—which vary from one to five days and are possibly just the inspiration the amateur needs to lend a little joy to the digging and the weeding.

The possibilities for learning are infinite, as is the pleasure that trying something new can bring—at Sotheby's Institute of Art evening classes you could study anything from Old Masters to opera. Practical painting courses are also booming in popularity, and the Painting Holiday Directory provides an invaluable source of ideas. Options vary from one-day sessions at British beauty spots to week-long holidays overseas. As a gift for a harried Londoner, a



The sumptuous surroundings of FireBird, above left, and a vodka and caviar tasting session, above, would be a hedonist's dream. Left, The English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden runs courses in many aspects of horticulture from Planting in Pots to the New Kitchen Garden, all designed to inspire both the green- and the brown-fingered gardener. Right, floral works of art come into their own at the Kenneth Turner Flower School.



weekend at Flatford Mill in Constable Country might appeal, or a single day out at Highlands Lodge in the Chiltern Hills, where the panoramic views have inspired many a budding artist. Whether a total beginner or highly experienced, just flipping through this guide will provide ample encouragement for picking up a paintbrush.

At the Embroiderers' Guild or the Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court, new stitches can be discovered: both cater for anybody from the merest beginner to those interested in such intricacies as gold and silk embroidery for churches, or Jacobean crewel work. Many of the courses go way beyond straightforward sewing, for instance the two-day Inspired by Lace is more design-led, while Use of Colour covers dying techniques for both paper and fabrics. The intriguing India in a Day explores the techniques of Indian embroidery, while Lustrous Silk Papers teaches students how to laminate natural fibres to construct their own textiles.

These are the sorts of presents that even the mythical person who has everything could enjoy. They can add depth and life to an existing interest or passion, or can offer an insight into something new and unknown that might just turn into a lifetime's passion. Whatever the interest, from photography to gardens, bird-watching to cookery, somebody, somewhere will help you to learn more.

LUCIA VAN DER POST writes for *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Sunday Times* and for the *Financial Times*.

SPECIAL READER INVITATION

Why not give a tutored caviar tasting at FireBird as a gift for Christmas? From January 2 until February 28, the restaurant will be offering *ILN* readers the opportunity to join one of a series of evening courses at the special price of £48. The tasting will include Sevruga, Oscietra and Royal Beluga caviar served with a traditional FireBird *zakuski* (hors d'oeuvres), with either a glass of champagne or vodka. Please contact Simone Miller or Elizabeth Jordan on the number given right, and mention *The Illustrated London News*. Offer subject to availability

ADDRESSES

Embroiderers' Guild, Apartment 41, Hampton Court Palace, Surrey.
Tel: 020 8943 1229.

FireBird, 23 Conduit Street, London W1.
Tel: 020 7493 7000.

Isola, 145 Knightsbridge, London SW1.
Tel: 020 7838 1044. Gourmet Wine Tour, £50.

Kenneth Turner Flower School. Tel: 020 7409 2560 for a brochure. Day courses, £195. Five-day intensive course, £900.

Michael Schuster. Tel: 020 7254 9734. Two hour, six-session courses (6.45-8.45pm). Each series, £155.

Red Letter Days. Tel: 020 8442 2000. Formula One days, around £1,000.

Sotheby's. Tel: 020 7462 3232. Brochure available for part-time and evening courses.

The English Gardening School. Tel: 020 7352 4347. Prices range from £85 for a single day to £495 for a five-day course.

The Royal School of Needlework. Tel: 020 8943 1432. Prices from £45 for a one-day course.

Waddesdon Manor, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. Tel: 01296 653226. Tutored wine-tasting days, £85.

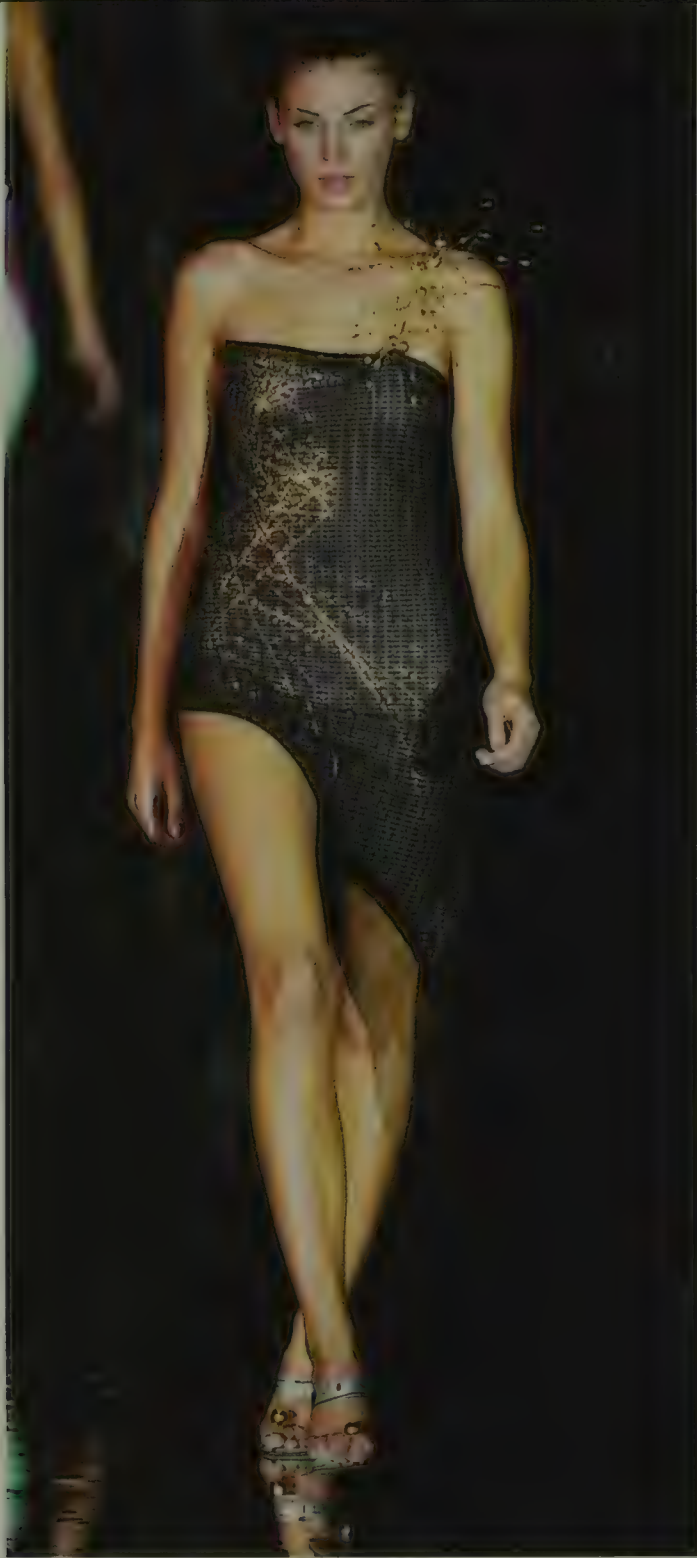
Claridge's cocktail-making courses, £57.50. Tel: 020 7409 6229/6307.

McQueens. Tel: 020 8510 0123. Private lesson with Ercole £410. One-day group course £180. One-week course £825.

Painting Holiday Directory. Tel: 01830 540215. Day course at Highland's Lodge Art Centre, Bedfordshire, £20. Weekend at Flatford Mill, £114.

**PUTTING
ON THE
GLITZ**





The designers are spoiling us. Faced with the dilemma of what to wear as the party season fast approaches, we can breathe a collective sigh of relief: fashion has gone all glitz. This season's look is pure indulgence—dazzling, bold fashions combined with equally flamboyant accessories. The headline-stealer at Welsh designer Julien MacDonald's Spring/Summer 2001 show during London Fashion Week was undoubtedly his knitted black dress, above. Encrusted with more than 1,000 diamonds and joined at the shoulder by a sparkling, solid-gold strap, the dress has an estimated price tag of around £1m and is reputed to be the most expensive outfit ever to have graced a British catwalk. Michael Kors' Autumn/Winter 2000 collection was pure, unadulterated glamour, with models sashaying down the catwalk in slinky silver numbers, previous page, and head-to-toe gold, above right. Yves Saint Laurent provided a slightly more understated, but equally stunning, gold creation, right, while Paco Rabanne sent models draped in dazzling lamé, far right, shimmering down its runway. Complete the outfit with a heavily textured, brightly coloured Fendi handbag, previous page, and you're ready to party.

[fashion]





CANDLE **CRAZY**

There's no escaping the current vogue for scented candles—they're in every fashionable shop and home. Why, wonders Josephine Fairley, have they suddenly lit up our lives?



THIS SEASON black may be the new black, but scented candles are definitely the new flowers. Suddenly homes, parties, beauty salons and even offices seem naked without them. And whereas 10 years ago a woman might buy herself a lipstick or a piece of flimsy underwear to cheer herself up, nowadays it's as likely to be a frivolously sculpted piece of fragrant wax.

Candles have eclipsed bouquets and chocolates as the ultimate gift for the hostess-with-the-mostest. The result? Between 1994 and 1998, the scented-candle market grew by an astonishing 107 per cent, to £31 million. In short, the scented candle is now seriously chic.

Unsurprisingly, the world's sultans of style have not been slow getting in on the act: Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, The Cross boutique, Nicole Farhi and Manhattan über-florist Robert Isabell have all launched successful candle collections. And any perfume house worth its bath essence is now adding candles to its range, enabling perfume-lovers to infuse their homes with the same scent they spritz behind their ears; from Bronnley through to Clinique and Guerlain—who have long produced de luxe fragrant candles, but are now capturing some of their contemporary scents in wax.

But today's candles have travelled a long way from their origins. Infused

The spirit of Christmas is evoked with candles shaped as Christmas trees, left, and Price's festive offerings include pine cones from its Victorian Christmas range, top left, and pebbles featuring messages of peace and love from the Classic Gold collection, top right. Above left, a jasmine-scented bath tub from the Bathroom Pleasures range and, above right, a fragrant cup of hot chocolate candle from the Gourmet Delight collection that was inspired by American coffee shops—just two examples of the myriad novelty designs available from Price's.

with expensive perfumes and moulded into architectural shapes, the huge cubes and towering pillars by Anne Séverine Liotard cost anything up to a staggering £900. Though there is no historical record of the first candles used by man, clay candleholders dating from the fourth century BC have been found in Egypt. And early candlemakers were certainly as inventive as the creators of today's hot sellers. Early Chinese and Japanese candles, for instance, were made with wax derived from insects and seeds, and moulded in paper tubes, while wax skimmed from boiling cinnamon provided tapers for use in temples throughout India.

The first-known candle in America dates from the first century AD, when Native Americans burned oily fish wedged into a forked stick. But candlemaking, as we know it, truly began in the 13th century, when chandlers travelled from door to door, making dipped tapers from the tallow or beeswax belonging to their wealthy clients. Until the advent of the first candle moulds in the 15th century, all candles were hand-dipped, but the invention of machines to do the task in the first half of the 19th century inspired a true renaissance in candle crafting. Materials fast-forwarded, manufacturing techniques, too: a combination of refined paraffin and stearin (from stearic acid and glycerine) enabled candles to burn longer and stronger—giving results very similar to the candles we burn today.

No history of candlemaking would be complete without a mention of Price's, whose vast Battersea showroom is a must-visit in the run-up to Christmas. Established in 1830, the company provided the snuffless candles by the light of which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were betrothed, earning Price's the role of official candlemaker to the Queen—a title it retains today. Florence Nightingale tiptoed among the Crimean casualties with a Price's candle lantern in one hand, while they also lit Captain Scott's expedition to the Antarctic. In fact, Price's has illuminated many of royalty's important occasions, including the weddings of the Prince of Wales to Lady Diana, and Prince Edward to Sophie Rhys-Jones.

In a world that can be illuminated and dimmed at the flick of a switch, candles have become lifestyle accessories. Says Mary Kwoka of Aveda: "You customise your home with music and furnishings, so why not with scent? It goes beyond simply putting perfume on the body and enables you to have a favourite fragrance throughout your environment. It makes your home even more personal."

Faith Popcorn, marketing visionary and author of trend bibles such as *The Popcorn Report* and *EVEolution: The Eight Truths of Marketing to Women*, refers to our new pre-occupation with the home as "anchoring". She feels that we are looking for a way to balance our lives. "Scents have the ability to settle and centre us. Lighting a candle and scenting the air is a ritual that helps to bring us back to ourselves." Claire Lloyd, author of *Sensual Living*, agrees: "Smell is important because nothing is more intimate. Nothing can sooner make, or mark, a mood than a scented candle."

According to David Harris, research and development chemist at Price's, candles scented with mountain java, chocolate and tea (the most chic hailing from Paris' Mariage Frères tea room) were introduced when experts were suggesting that when selling your house, appetising smells would help. But as candle consumers become more educated, believes Nicky Kinnaird—who devotes an increasing amount of room in her Space NK beauty chain to candles—"they become more discerning about quality". Forget dewberry or strawberry; at Space NK the hottest-selling line is its own-label Mediterranean Evening, "a combination of lily, fig and musk that conjures up the scent in the air as the sun goes down in Italy, or the Côte d'Azur".

CANDLE POWER

Specialist perfumer Jilly Fraysse explains how to make the most of scented candles:

The biggest trick, when you have been burning the candle for a while, is to centre the wick after you have blown it out, once it cools slightly.

If your candle has a lid, use it to extinguish the candle and to keep the dust out. Keep candles dust-free. If they have been unused for a while be sure to clean them—dust interferes with burning.

Keep candles away from draughts and open windows or they will burn too quickly.

After half an hour you have probably obtained the maximum amount of fragrance from a candle in one session. The only reason to keep it burning after that is for ambience, not scent.

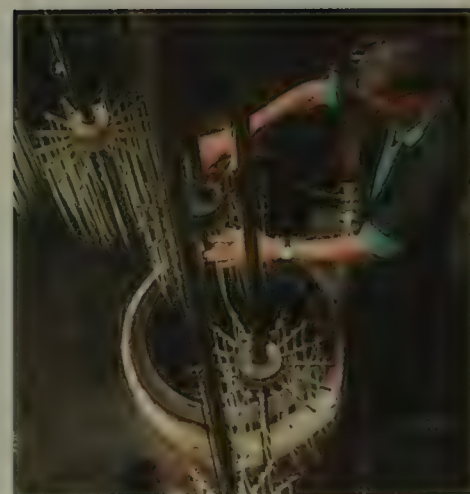
Build a "wardrobe" of scented candles just as you would with fragrances. Spicy, woody candles are great for winter nights. Ultra-florals are more summery.

Don't necessarily dismiss designer candles that cost upwards of £40: you invariably get value for your money. Jilly Fraysse says: "The more expensive candles usually disperse their fragrance further, last longer and tend to burn more easily."

And just as Parisiennes have long imported the smell of the countryside to their metropolis by lighting luxurious Diptyque candles, so Londoners are increasingly doing the same. Diptyque's Feuilles de Lavande (aromatic with the scent of lavender leaves) is a bestseller at Space NK.

Perhaps the best candle selection in the country is at Les Senteurs in Belgravia, a veritable temple to the flickering wick. Here you'll find every olfactory temptation, from the exotic, floral Empire Celeste by Manuel Canovas to the erotic, sultry Ambre du Nepal by Maître Parfumeur et Gantier.

But there is no need to head for a specialist perfumer to find candle couture. Interior designers, certainly, regard them as essential, as much a finishing touch as a swag or a rug. Nina Campbell offers a range of perfumed candles, and even Bennison Fabrics, famous for its hand-made prints adapted from 18th- and 19th-century designs, has entered the market, with a confection by perfumer Lyn Harris that,



MISTIN / A. ANT





according to Bennisson's owners, "captures the fragranced air of the orange groves at our Majorcan *finca*, tinged with the scent of almond blossom, thyme and marjoram". And hotelier Anouska Hempel is allegedly working on a candle "that will smell quite curious—ginger and lily with cigar smoke".

Yet despite today's candle madness, perhaps we still do not value "environmental fragrance" as much as our ancestors did. The Japanese used scent-clocks that released a different incense every hour, enabling them to tell the time by their noses. The Chinese had—and often still have—joss sticks and perfume burners by every front door, and tucked aromatic tree bark into their laundry.

Insider talk is that "designer incense" will soon be giving candles a run for their money. But there is, for now, still more than a whiff of status attached to lighting up your life with a burning wick. As names like Diptyque, Catherine Memmi and Patricia de Nicolaï become increasingly

available in the UK, some candle-lovers are on a global quest to bring back ever-more-obscure creations, rather as our forebears plundered the East for spices, silks and woods.

Nicky Kinnaid likes to save them the trouble, however, and, having recently returned from Paris' Maison et Objets home decoration and gift show, reports that "the number of candle producers has increased about six-fold in the last six months". Space NK's customers, indeed, are snapping up candles three or four at a time, "choosing different scents for the bedroom, the living room and even the kitchen".

And why not? For as one candle devotee of my acquaintance observed, "to go on living in an aroma-free zone with all this going on would be like wearing beige for the rest of your life... Or black, come to that."

JOSEPHINE FAIRLEY is beauty editor of the *Mail on Sunday's You Magazine*.

Christmas candles, above, are available in a range of festive fragrances, shapes and colours. Top left, once made by hand using tallow or beeswax, the development of candlemaking machines in the 19th century, together with the discovery of paraffin wax and stearic acid, revolutionised the process. Left, Florence Nightingale clasped a Price's candle lantern as she watched over the casualties of the Crimean War. Price's candles, tel: 020 7228 2001. Les Senteurs, tel: 020 7730 2322.

MONASTIC MIXERS

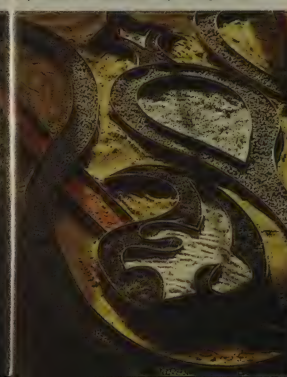
No longer confined to a thimble-sized tot after dinner, liqueurs are flaunting their jewelled colours in the capital's best cocktail bars. Andrew Jefford applauds Chartreuse and other great digestifs.



Below left, a monk examines liqueur from one of the distillery vats at the mountain fastness of the La Grande-Chartreuse, above, 14 miles north of Grenoble. Some of the herbs and spices used



in the production of Benedictine at Fécamp, below right and left.



OUR WORLD, it often seems, is one of fracture, dislocation and isolation. Perhaps, though, we are just not looking closely enough. What, you might ask, do London's nose-studied barflies and mini-skirted night owls have to do with a life of silence, celibacy and prayer in a monastic fastness in the French Alps? Everything, it turns out, as this seasonal tale will reveal.

St Bruno was a remarkable man. This flat-faced, 11th-century German was a gifted scholar and an astute church politician, yet he longed for, and repeatedly returned to, the monastic life. His most enduring legacy today is the Carthusian order, which he founded in 1084 by striding off with six companions into a closed valley in the high, wooded Alps. He built a church and a few huts in that place of bone-fingering mist, rustling leaves and jagged crag-calls. The monastery is still there today, much changed (it has been destroyed once by an avalanche and eight times by fire), yet still suffused with the spiritual peace and serenity that St Bruno and his friends sought. At two in the morning, illuminated only by candles, on every night of the year, the monks continue to perform their work of prayer for those who suffer in this world.

During the day, meanwhile, three of them buy herbs and plants from suppliers both in France and abroad, assemble them in the proportions decreed by a recipe which came into their possession in the early-17th century, and tap away at computers in order to operate a distillery some 20 miles away. They don't talk to outsiders, and only speak to each other during their weekly woodland walk on a Monday. Those three monks make the liqueur we call



Above left to right, Carthusian monks take to the mountains to collect the herbs that flavour Chartreuse, which can be drunk on the rocks or mixed into an explosive cocktail, below.

Chartreuse. It's the greatest in existence: no question. This Yquem of the liqueur world comes in two colours, yellow (sold at a normal 40 per cent alcohol by volume) and green (sold at a challenging 55 per cent abv). Aged versions are also available called VEP (Vieillessement Exceptionnellement Prolongé), which have been rounded and smoothed by 10 or more years in the cask. You can also buy an Elixir Végétal, which comes as close to the original recipe as is commercially feasible (the original is said to be emetic and undrinkable), and is sold in small 10cl bottles in a rounded wooden case—to stop the liqueur discolouring. It's 71 per cent abv, and you take it, a few drops at a time, to soothe gastric woes.

There are 130 ingredients in Chartreuse, and the recipe is, of course, secret, though the monks have let the world know that it begins "Take three good handfuls of lemon-balm flowers..." It's safe to assume that there will be classic botanicals in there such as lemon peel, orange peel, gentian, angelica root and orris root; there'll be herb and flower ingredients, too, for instance mint and lime blossom. We do know that the recipe has never been changed, so the ingredients reflect the limits of the known world at the dawn of the 17th century. No star anise, in other words; no maté; no lemon grass. Last time I was there I tracked down one of the local suppliers, a teacher called Pascal Rey, who walks the mountains every late-summer to gather wild herbs and plants. He told me about a relative of St John's wort called *vulnéraire* that he gathers for the monks. He didn't know what the monks used it for, he said, but I think it's safe to assume they don't wash their hair in it.

Put Chartreuse, and particularly Green Chartreuse, side by side with any other liqueur in a tasting and it will blow them off the table. Yellow Chartreuse is honeyed, lemony, viscous and subtle, its sweetness chased down by a torrent of peels and zests. Green Chartreuse smells as a forest must smell to a hovering angel, packed with subtle notes of leaf, pine, thyme, spices and roots. In flavour it's powerful, the plant and herb tastes detonating in the mouth and vaporising through every cranial passageway, a saturated apotheosis of the plant world.

Chartreuse is unusual in another way, too: it's the only internationally celebrated liqueur of monastic origin still produced by monks. Bénédictine, as you might imagine, also has monastic origins—in this case those of the Benedictine Abbey of Fécamp in Normandy. The liqueur is based on the recipe for a medicinal cordial prepared by one of the abbey's 16th-century monks, Dom Bernardo Vincelli (it has a mere 27 ingredients compared to Chartreuse's 130). In commercial terms, though, it has always been an entirely secular business: the Abbey was destroyed during the French Revolution, and the recipe eventually came into the hands of a local wine merchant called Alexandre le Grand, who recreated it and first commercialised it in the 1860s. The "D.O.M." you'll see on each bottle is a commercially astute cap-doffing exercise both to God (*Deo Optimo Maximo*—to God, most good, most great) and to Dom Bernardo himself. Le Grand was

stunningly successful with Bénédictine, as anyone who visits the "factory" in Fécamp quickly discovers; it's a building worthy of Citizen Kane himself, and it houses le Grand's eccentric collections (of locks and travelling chests, among other things). You can also see some of the ingredients being assembled there; on my visit I watched, fascinated, as dried maidenhair fern was unpacked from brown paper wrappers. You might also spot myrrh, Spanish saffron, vanilla pods, yarrow, cardamom, nutmeg and tea. Bénédictine is the only herbal liqueur which provides worthy competition to Chartreuse in terms of power and subtlety of flavour: it's a browner, softer, more honeyed liqueur, much less vividly herbal than Chartreuse, but still intense with spicy, vanilla-tea richness.

Cointreau and Grand Marnier (the latter, unusually, uses cognac alone as its spirit-base) are the key liqueurs in the large group known as curaçaos or triple secs. All of these are based on orange peels, the finest of which were thought to come from the island of Curaçao some 70 miles off the Venezuelan coast. Whisky makes another fine spirit-base for liqueurs, the best-known of which is Drambuie. The origins of this liqueur are still more legend-encrusted than the monastic specialities: it is said to be based on Bonny Prince Charlie's personal liqueur, which passed into the Mackinnon family (in gratitude for that famous boat ride from the Scottish mainland to Skye and other acts of dangerous hospitality). The whiskies are compounded with herbs and spices to give a liqueur of sweetly heathery subtlety. Many of the most popular liqueurs of recent times have been cream-based, to provide a kind of alcoholic pudding in a glass. Bailey's Irish Cream is, in my opinion, the best, thanks once again to its subtlety: it has the ability to whisper "coffee" and "chocolate" to the drinker without ever quite con-

firming either in flavour terms. I'd also commend the South African Amarula Cream to your attention, a delicious cream liqueur based on the fruit of the amarula tree, to which elephants are said to be partial. They are obviously beasts of discernment. Amarula Cream has an eerily peachy quality, which melds memorably with the cream itself.

In the past, liqueurs were mostly drunk neat. I once had the chance to spend the afternoon looking through the old account books of the St James' Street wine merchants Berry Bros & Rudd. Amid the listed orders of Pape-Clément for Edward VII and Bernkasteler Doktor for Grand Duke Michael of Russia, I found mention of 30 litres of Chartreuse (nothing else) sent up the road to the Ritz for the Aga Khan between May and November, 1924. Merchant bankers N M Rothschild used to regularly buy two dozen bottles of Chartreuse every year. Many things have combined to erode our fondness for neat liqueurs (drink-drive regulations, weight-watching, dental health concerns, sedentary lifestyles), but the truth is that these drinks on their own, no matter how complex and wonderful they may be, exert a weaker appeal to drinkers every year. For the monks of Chartreuse, this is a serious matter. Every penny of profit made by sales of the

Outrageously Hard: pour the following ingredients into a test tube (that's what the recipe says, but a glass will do). Half a shot gomme (sugar syrup); half a shot pisang Ambon; half a shot lemon juice; half a shot il limone; one shot Green Chartreuse; half a shot absinthe. Garnish with a Viagra pill. Recipe by Alex Kammerling of Detroit Bar, 35 Earlham Sreet, WC1. Chartreuse cocktails are available at Navajo Joe, 34 King St, WC2; Teatro, 93-107 Shaftesbury Ave, W1; and other leading London bars. Chartreuse products are available from Fortnum & Mason, which also has a good general selection of liqueurs.



Food of the gods: sweet, orange-flavoured crêpes with Grand Marnier.

drink returns to the monastery; it is its sole source of income. There may only be 40 monks left, but this is the mother house of the order and there is a huge maintenance bill (the roofs alone cover some 24 acres). How, therefore, can 21st-century 21-year-olds be persuaded to carry on drinking Chartreuse?

Britain's bar revolution has come at just the right moment. Liqueurs may have ceased being the favourite bedtime tippie of the older generation, but that's no reason why the bright young things shouldn't knock them back dissolved in lurid cocktails during a big night out in Soho. The man charged with ensuring that Chartreuse continues to sell as well as it ever has in the past in Britain is Mark Symonds of importers John E Fells & Sons. "We looked at the liqueur," he says, "and we decided that the key thing about it was that it was outrageous. It's got this deep green colour and yet it's 100 per cent natural; it contains 130 herbs and infusions; and it's sold at 55 per cent abv, meaning that it's definitely not sessionable. You have to drink it either as a shot, or as a key ingredient in a cocktail." Symonds' strategy was to run a year-long cocktail competition in conjunction with the bar magazine *Class*, with a prize for the most "outrageous" cocktail.

But, before I tell you who the winner was, let's think a little about monks and marketing. The Carthusians delegate the task to a charitable company called Chartreuse Diffusion, who in turn commission the likes of Mark Symonds to get on with the job in every country where the drink is sold. The director of Chartreuse Diffusion is a pipe-smoking philosopher called Jean-Marc Roget. He knows that Chartreuse has to communicate itself in a way that is relevant to today's younger generation. "If they like it, it will become part of their world, and they will do whatever they wish with it. But we are not going to advertise it using girls in bikinis." Do the monks check? "They like to be informed of what we do. They count on us not to cheat too much. They do know we cheat a little by accident. But if we did things totally against their beliefs, they would know it in a day." He tells the story of an American importer who once took out an advertisement for Chartreuse in *Playboy* magazine. Twenty-four hours later, news had reached the monks and he had become an ex-importer.

Bearing all this in mind, I was mildly surprised to discover the winner of the Outrageous Drinks competition was Alex Kammerling of the Detroit Bar in Covent Garden with a drink called Outrageously Hard (it comes garnished with a Viagra pill—the full recipe is given left). Personally, I'd have gone for Outrageously Strong (one shot of Green Chartreuse plus three shots of vodka), a Chartreuse Martini created by Kevin Freeman of Navajo Joe; or the lurid Outrageously Healthy (one shot each of Green Chartreuse, Midori and pineapple juice, shaken with half a shot of freshly squeezed lemon juice), created by Alain Decesse of the bar at Teatro.

So far as I know, though, the monks have not intervened from on high, and Mark Symonds has yet to be struck by their thunderbolt. "The essence," he says, "is enjoying life and having fun." Perhaps it is.

ANDREW JEFFORD is an author, photographer and radio presenter, and drink correspondent for *The Evening Standard*.



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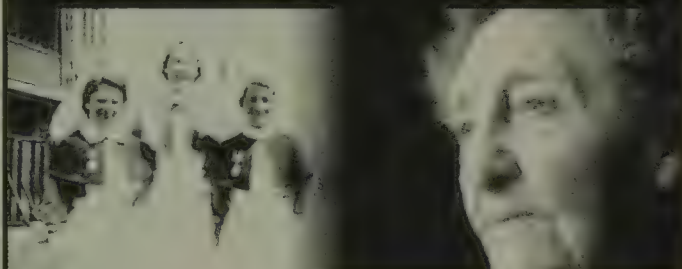
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The 12 restaurants of Christmas

Charles Campion selects a different dining room for each of the 12 days of Christmas.

SLIP BACK ONLY 100 years and Christmas was the occasion for one long, serious party. Nowadays, the Christmas lights may be lit in Oxford Street even before the evenings start drawing in, but the truly festive part of the season has been unpardonably compressed. On Christmas Day you eat far too much. On Boxing Day you argue. The day after that you start yearning to be back at work. Where did we go wrong? Christmas used to be a feast that stretched almost throughout a fortnight. The 12 days of Christmas ran all the way from December 25 to Twelfth Night, and you had no business being sensible on any of them. Granted you had to eat an indifferent mince pie on each evening to guarantee 12 happy months in the year to come, but it was a time of fun. Let us bring back this 12-day idea, but why not adapt it to suit modern mores? Recent research of dusty archives has revealed that when the old troubadour wrote the ditty "The Twelve Days of Christmas", what he was actually composing was a mnemonic to help him remember his restaurant bookings. Here is how it would translate for Christmas 2000:

A partridge in a pear tree
This, quite obviously, refers to dining on a partridge, which is Britain's pre-eminent game bird with a considerably more delicate flavour than the coarser grouse or blander pheasant. A good place to go for partridge is Rules in Maiden Lane. At first glance, any suggestion that you should visit "London's oldest restaurant, established in 1798" and join the tourist treadmill is enough to make the stoutest gastronomic finch. But, take heart: David Chambers took over as head chef in 1997, and the elegant, old restaurant has become a bustling brasserie, while still concentrating on classic game cookery. As well as partridge you'll find some splendid venison and very decent fish. And, if the Dickensian Christmas strikes a chord, you can finish up with mushrooms and walnuts on toast because at Rules you can still end each meal with a savoury.
Rules, 35 Maiden Lane, WC2. 020 7636 5314. £90-£120*

Two turtle doves
Here the bard was obsessed with all that lovey-dovey stuff, cooing and billing. He probably meant *Passione* in Charlotte Street, except that it only opened in 1999. As its name suggests, this is indeed a passionate kind of place, and it is run by Jamie Oliver's mentor, Gennaro Contaldo. Pasta, risotto and honest peasant dishes are all good here, as is the bread—pukka focaccia as the Naked Chef would put it. This is a place to go and steadily work your way through four courses, with a suitably indulgent emphasis on truffles and wild mushrooms. Nothing encourages lovebirds so much as that well-fed, slightly light-headed feeling that is the hallmark of an excellent Italian meal. The wine list also gives scope for a romantic flutter.

**Passione, 10 Charlotte Street, W1.
020 7636 2889. £80-£120***

Three French hens
This is clearly the occasion to repare to Club Gascon in Smithfield, where first-rate poultry is top on the bill of fare. This fashionable restaurant was set up by Pascal Assignac to showcase the authentic food of Gascony, the Landes and Toulouse—which is shorthand for foie gras, foie gras and foie gras—plus some dishes made with other parts of the goose and also *confit*, beans and *sauce*. In the face of all this richness, the dining style, which encourages you to try a large number of dishes in extremely small portions—a sort of flexible tasting menu—is perfectly suited to the task in hand. This year saw the opening of the Cellar Gascon next door, which is not a cellar but a wine bar. It is open throughout the day, and is very handy if you have overslept past lunchtime.
**Club Gascon, 57 West Smithfield, EC1.
020 7253 5853. £90-£140***

Four calling birds
This is the name given to the call ducks used by decoy men in the 19th century. (Call ducks were the tame birds that lured wild ones into the decoy—a kind of large trap). There's nothing finer than a Fat Duck, and you'll find a restaurant of the same name in the pretty riverside village of Bray, close to Maidenhead. Originally an old inn, it has since been refurbished in a modern rustic style, with exposed beams, stone floors and a hand-beaten copper bar. Heston Blumenthal's Michelin-starred food is unlike any other in Britain: strange, but precise, combinations of flavour, and undoubted technical excellence. How about roast scallop, almond and cauliflower purée, marinated cep and a jelly of oloroso sherry—giant, perfectly cooked scallops and a light and intense purée that is implausibly delicious. And as for the oloroso jelly—it is just awesome. Or perhaps a lasagne of langoustines, pea's trotter and truffles appeals? Trotter haters need not fear: tiny strips of the meat add a rich quality that perfectly complements the crustaceans. A lot of thought and creativity goes into the menu at The Fat Duck. Highly interesting eating.
**The Fat Duck, High Street, Bray, Berkshire.
01628 580333. £100-£150***



See 2000 out in seasonal style by taking a gastronomic tour down the River Thames this Christmas. Fill the 12 days between Christmas Day and Twelfth Night by enjoying festive feasts in one of 12 specially selected restaurants.

[restaurants]



Five gold rings

Here we must question the quillmanship of the scribe: this is obviously a reference to Richard Corrigan's restaurant at Lindsay House and, in particular, to the patterns of gold leaf on the walls, which are a feature of the otherwise Spartan décor. Corrigan is cooking better than ever. The Michelin inspectors have noticed, and all of foodie London agrees. Wildly inventive, but deeply rooted in simple dishes stemming from top quality British produce. Starters bring unusual flavour combinations such as smoked eel with fennel, while mains demonstrate Corrigan's obsession with full-blooded, rich flavours—monkfish wrapped in cured ham, choucroute, brown shrimp and red wine. Service is suave, and the whole is an experience to be revelled in.

Richard Corrigan at Lindsay House, 21 Romilly Street, W1. 020 7439 0450. £100-£150*



Six geese a-laying

This is rather strange, as geese lay only in spring and, to date, the best efforts of farmers have failed to persuade them to do otherwise. This is why we only get roast goose between Michaelmas and Christmas. But, wild geese have a longer season, and should you find yourself in Holland and Holland purchasing a few boxes of cartridges, you can wander across Bruton Street to The Square for sustenance. The Square is a thoroughly accomplished restaurant: Michelin bespangled; grown-up, formal atmosphere; stratospheric wine list; and great food. Philip Howard's cooking is worthy of special praise—dishes such as poached fillet of veal with a wild mushroom and asparagus lasagne, or pear *tarte tatin* with red-wine ice cream, are created from the finest seasonal produce treated in the right way to bring out every nuance of flavour and texture.

The Square, 6 Bruton Street, W1. 020 7795 7100. £120-£160*



Seven swans a-swimming

It is hard to take swans seriously. On the surface all is leisurely and serene, but we all know that under the water their webbed feet are working away like mad. Much the same kind of thing can be observed at Stefano Cavallini's restaurant in the Halkin Hotel. Cavallini creates some of London's best Italian dishes for customers who are in the unruffled-exterior-but-frantic-hidden-agenda mould. This is every inch a restaurant in which to swan around and be seen. Amid all this glamour it is cheering to find good gnocchi and pasta, and a welcome respect for fine cheeses. Dishes worth a detour include rabbit ravioli with mushrooms and the highly festive partridge with pomegranate sauce.

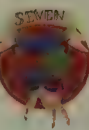
Stefano Cavallini at the Halkin Hotel, 5 Halkin Street, SW1. 020 7333 1234. £100-£150*



Eight maids a-milking

Absolutely Fabulous only confirmed what we knew already: that for a certain section of the glitterati, Harvey Nichols is as vital a component of the London scene as oxygen is to the rest of us. These fair maids can be spotted in the fashion and cosmetics departments milking their credit cards for all they are worth. Naturally, they have to stop occasionally to rest their weary feet and absorb a touch of Bolly and Stoly. When they do, the Fifth Floor Restaurant is the venue of choice. Hidden among this giddy social whirl is some fine cooking, as the Fifth Floor Restaurant places an admirable emphasis on seasonal ingredients. Look out for inventive salads and good, simple soups. The wine list is formidable—as you would expect, since Harvey Nichols' fine-wine department is only a sommelier's shamle away.

The Fifth Floor Restaurant, Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, SW1. 020 7235 5250. £90-£130*



Nine ladies dancing

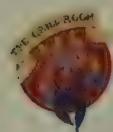
If you're looking for dancing, you'll find it aplenty in one of London's more ambitious nightclubs—Home in Leicester Square. Perched on the seventh floor of a converted art-deco building, above five floors of club, is the restaurant which, sensibly enough, is called Seven. The chef in charge here is Richard Turner, who made his way here via the ultra-cool Hotel Tresanton in Cornwall and the Pharmacy restaurant in Notting Hill. The restaurant has splendid views across London from the covered terrace and a soothing décor inside of muted greys and creams, with dark-wood furnishings. The menu weaves an eclectic path across Europe so that gazpacho Andaluz rubs shoulders with Stilton and red onion salad with peppered beef, and prosciutto San Daniele. The restaurant is open until midnight, making it the perfect prelude to a night of festive dancing downstairs.

Seven, 1 Leicester Square, WC2. 020 7909 1177. £80-£110*

Wonderfully grand and fanciful, the oldest restaurant in London, Rules, top, is the place to enjoy classic British fare. Specialising in game, the birds that feature on the menu are reared exclusively on Rules' estate in the High Pennines, North Yorkshire. The Square, above, has deservedly earned itself two Michelin stars, with the invaluable assistance of innovative head chef Philip Howard. Revel in the eclectic European food and thoroughly modern surroundings.



The Grill Room at the Dorchester was voted one of the top 10 hotel restaurants in the world by *Hotels* magazine. It is not difficult to see why—the opulent grandeur of the dining room, combined with a menu that is changed daily to incorporate only the best seasonal produce, makes The Grill Room an ideal venue to enjoy a festive feast. Seven, below, sits atop one of the most popular nightclubs in London, *Home*. While party people groove to the beat downstairs, discerning eaters tuck in to eclectic European fare, courtesy of ultra-fashionable chef Richard Turner.



Ten Lords a-leaping

If you are looking for Lords, The Grill Room at the Dorchester is the ideal place to begin your search. There is a delightful formality about London's very best hotels, and the Dorchester, with its lengthy internal promenade, manages to be both grand and comfortable at the same time. The cooking at the grill combines tradition and fresh, top-quality ingredients. The Dorchester Christmas pudding is particularly notable, having spent months maturing in readiness. The Grill Room is an oasis of calm in this modern age—an attribute one need not be ennobled to appreciate.

The Grill Room at the Dorchester, 54 Park Lane, W1.
020 7629 8888. £120-£160*



Eleven pipers piping

When it comes to piping, there is only Boisdale. This Scottish restaurant is owner-driven by Ranald MacDonald, the man who is next in line to become Chief of Clànranald. An oasis of conviviality, it serves Scottish food cooked from Scottish recipes, and has a bar that groans under a vast selection of rare and elderly Scotch whisky. Indulge yourself: choose the special haggis menu, which is a multi-course affair with a genuine MacSween haggis from Edinburgh as its centrepiece, always presuming that they have been able to trap some—haggis tend to hibernate in the festive season before re-emerging in time for Burns Night.

Boisdale, 15 Ecclestone Street, SW1.
020 7730 6922. £90-£120*



Twelve drummers drumming

This is another section where the passage of time has rendered the troubadour's scroll very faint, but it probably refers to the persistent drumming noise and fierce ache behind the eyes that is a certain consequence of visiting London restaurants during the festive season. Or, perhaps it is a reference to lunching at Kensington Place, a restaurant where the happy chatter of diners rebounds from the windows to make



an inviting din? This is a busy, buzzy restaurant with a loyal clientele that is drawn by Rowley Leigh's admirable, ever-changing menu, which offers modern British dishes featuring the best of what the markets have to offer. These might include spiced, grilled quails, griddled foie gras with sweetcorn pancake, and guinea fowl with tajine vegetables and saffron. Lunch is a particular bargain, and now you can even sit down and enjoy breakfast there too.

Kensington Place, 201 Kensington Church Street, W8.
020 7727 3184. £90-£120*

**all prices represent a rough guide to a full three-course meal for two people, including wine, but not being wildly, festively extravagant!*

CHARLES CAMPION is a Glenfiddich Restaurant Writer of the Year award winner who writes about food and restaurants for *ES*—the magazine for London's *Evening Standard*.

Starting out penning short stories for Christmas issues of *The ILN*, Stephen Gregory never dreamed that one day his skills would be called for in Hollywood and his ideas conceived on Frank Sinatra's putting green.

Billy Friedkin was waiting in the lobby at nine o'clock—a sleek, handsome man in his late 50s, fettled by massage and manicure. Over scrambled eggs in the hotel restaurant, he asked me about Caernarfon and the castle he thought I

Linda liked to work in darkness. The blinds were drawn and her desk lit by perfumed candles; bouquets of dead roses hung on the walls.

He was so excited that we talked for another hour before I emerged, through Linda's candlelit shrine, into the

[illegible]

By then, I had lived in the Bel Age Hotel for three months. As well as the Mexican trip, I'd had weekends in San Francisco, Yosemite, and in the deserts of Joshua Tree, all at the expense of Spelling Films. The bills were mounting. The executives, who had expected me to be in LA for a fortnight, insisted that I return to Wales to work on the story there, faxing the pages to Billy's office at Paramount.

I was back in Hollywood recently, working on a new project. In the offices of another well-known production company, I was asked about the material I had written for William Friedkin—they want to rework it, develop it. So it seems that the essence of evil I conceived on Frank Sinatra's putting green is still very much alive.

Stephen Gregory's writing career began when his short stories were published by *The Illustrated London News*, top left. He moved to North Wales, above left, where he was inspired to pen his first novel, *The Cormorant*, above, which was subsequently turned into a film starring Ralph Fiennes, above centre. William Friedkin, top centre, seen here during the filming of *The Exorcist*, read Gregory's novels and summoned him to Hollywood to collaborate on a film. Stephen Gregory, opposite, receiving the star treatment in *Hollywood*, and top right, as he sits beside Sinatra's outfitting crew.



TOP TICKETS

FROM STAGE TO SCREEN, GALLERIES TO CONCERT HALLS

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Theatre

Jim Davidson's £1 million pantomime *Dick Whittington & the National Theatre of Brent's Messiah* are among the many festive offerings this Christmas. Daryl Hannah, Macaulay Culkin & Irene Jacob have all recently made the leap from screen to stage but Oscar-winner Jessica Lange's appearance in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* should prove the most interesting. Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* is revived with Michael Gambon while his adaptation of *Proust* opens at the National.

The Blue Room David Hare's play, freely adapted from Schnitzler's *La Ronde* about a sexual day's chain of brief encounters, was first seen at the Donmar Warehouse in 1998 with a briefly nude Nicole Kidman grabbing all the attention. Camilla Power amply fills her shoes in the roles of model, actress, politician's wife & so forth who encounter various men (all played by Michael Higgs) in Loveday Ingram's astute Chichester Festival Theatre revival. The shifting degrees of sexual tension are sustained with engaging style & vivacity. Until Nov 25. Theatre Royal, Haymarket, SW1 (020 7930 8800).

The Caretaker Harold Pinter's 1960 claustrophobic play established the playwright's reputation & gave Donald Pleasence one of his most memorable roles as the manipulative tramp who shares a house with two brothers. Now Michael Gambon may well make the part his own

in Patrick Marber's major revival which also features Rupert Graves & astute Pinter player Douglas Hodge. Open Nov 15. Comedy, Panton St, SW1 (020 7369 1731).

The Cherry Orchard Trevor Nunn uses the intimate confines of the National's Cottesloe Theatre to moving effect for Chekhov's final masterpiece, given a lively new translation by David Lan. Vanessa Redgrave & brother Corin play wonderfully together as the ageing, landed siblings who ignore social & economic change at their peril, refusing to grow up by clinging to the past. In a string of fine performances, Roger Allam is superb as the entrepreneur Lopakhin & Eve Best is touchingly tender as the adopted, love-lorn daughter Varya. Cottesloe, National Theatre, South Bank, SE1 (020 7452 3000).

Le Costume Paris-based theatre legend Peter Brook continues his multi-cultural approach to theatre with a rare visit to London. His new production is a play by Can Themba, set in a South African township, in which a husband

forces his wife to treat her lover's suit as an honoured guest in their house. Jan 24-Feb 3. Young Vic, The Cut, SE1 (020 7928 6363).

A Doll's House From Jane Eyre to *War & Peace*, Shared Experience often manages to bring a passionate freshness to familiar work. Now the company tackles Ibsen's play about the claustrophobic, destructive tensions of marriage & parochial small-town life, with Anne-Marie Duff, last seen in the West End opposite Helen Mirren in *Collected Stories*, as frustrated housewife Nora. Until Dec 9. New Ambassadors, West St, WC2 (020 7836 6111).

Fallen Angels First seen in the West End in 1925 with Tallulah Bankhead, Noel Coward's comedy is revived by Michael Rudman, Felicity Kendal & Frances de la Tour play long-time friends trapped in dull marriages whose passions are stirred by a shared former flame. Apollo, Shaftesbury Ave, W1 (020 7494 5070).

Far Away Fresh from the success of his movie directorial debut, Billy Elliot, Stephen Daldry returns to the stage for the world premiere of the latest drama by Caryl Churchill (*Cloud Nine, Blue Heart*) whose plays continue to surprise with their structural innovation.

In *Far Away*, a middle-aged woman is forced to reassess her life when she visits her aunt. Excellent character actress Linda Bassett is among the cast. Nov 23-Dec 22. Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court, Sloane Sq, SW1 (020 7565 5000).

I Just Stopped By to See the Man Whether adapting Dickens or writing his own plays, such as the tragicomic *The Libertine*, Stephen Jeffreys fills his play with theatrical verve & surprise. His latest play is no less intriguing. Set in the underworld of the American blues delta, it follows the efforts of a member of an English rock band to unravel the mystery behind a legendary blues singer's death. Richard Wilson directs. Open Dec 4. Royal Court, Sloane Sq, SW1 (020 7565 5000).

Balancing act: Jason Watkins plays the cunning servant with two jobs on the go in Lee Hall's lively adaptation of *A Servant to Two Masters*



BELOW: ANDREW MARSHALL; LEFT: R. BURTON/SON

charts a long day of recrimination among an alcoholic actor's New England family. Charles Dance plays the sold-out patriarch, Oscar-winning actress Jessica Lange is his morphine-addicted wife, & Paul Rudd & Paul Nicholls are the sons damaged by their consensual marriage. Open Nov 21. The Lyric, Shaftesbury Ave, W1 (020 7494 5045).

Madame Melville Macaulay Culkin, former child star of the *Home Alone* movies, may be 20 but he's still not acting his age. He makes his West End debut, in a new play by American playwright Richard Nelson, as a 15-year-old student in Paris who falls for the charms of his cultured 30-year-old teacher (beguiling French screen actress Irene Jacob). Vaudeville, Strand, WC2 (020 7836 5987).

Merrily We Roll Along Michael Grandage revives Stephen Sondheim's 1981 musical, based on a play by Moss Hart & George S Kaufman, which charts how a composer's overweening hunger for success affects & corrupts his friendship with a lyricist & a writer.

What the Dickens?

Scrooge kicks out in Christopher Hampton's dance adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* at the Royal Festival Hall

Blonde ambition: Daryl Hannah brings Hollywood glamour to the West End in *The Seven Year Itch*



Lee Hall: a servant to serious fun

What some writers would have been happy to have achieved in a lifetime, Lee Hall seems to have pulled off in 12 months. This year alone, the Newcastle-born 33-year-old has seen West End airings of *Spanner's Steinberg*, his radio-to-stage play about a dining opera-loving, autistic girl; *Cooking with Elvis*, an idiosyncratic, kitsch musical starring comedian Frank Skinner, and his acclaimed translation of Brecht's *Mother Courage* on tour, as well as scripting the heartwarming British movie *Billy Elliot*.

Hall, below, vows this flurry of activity with modesty. "It's odd to be characterised as successful," he says. "From where I stand, it feels like a lot of hard graft." But his output is undiminished. December sees the openings of his irreverent translation of Golden's 19th-century farce *A Servant to Two Masters* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* at the Lyric Hammersmith. Both plays reflect his desire to capture a spirit of "serious fun". "I like stories that are full, like Jacobean tragedies, involving a great piling on of catastrophe that can be ridiculous and profound at the same time."

Having recently finished adapting Deborah Moggach's novel *Tulp Fever* for Steven Spielberg, Hall is now writer-in-residence for the RSC and is working on an update of Plato's *Symposium* as well as a comedy about Samuel Foots, an 18th-century actor-manager who still tried the boards after having a leg amputated. When he says "I feel as if I'm at the tip of an iceberg in terms of what is possible", you can't help but believe him. *A Servant to Two Masters* is at the New Ambassadors, Dec 11-Jan 29. See page 116.

IAN JOHNS



The story moves backwards during the course of the show, ending with all three meeting for the first time as optimistic young students. *Opens Dec 11. Donmar Warehouse, Earlham St, WC2 (020 369 1732).*

Napoleon Talented opera director Francesco Zambello oversees this big-budget musical from Canada, which focuses on the French leader's ill-fated relationship with Josephine. Paul Baker & Broadway musical actress Anastasia Barzee play the high-powered couple. *Shaftesbury Theatre, Shaftesbury Ave, WC2 (020 7379 5399).*

Noises Off Michael Frayn's ingenious & hilarious 1982 farce within a farce follows the on- & off-stage antics of a touring company as it muddles through from dress rehearsal to final performance of a sex comedy called *Nothing On*. Patricia Hodge & Victoria Wood stalwart Susie Blake are among the hapless farceurs. *Lyttelton, National Theatre, South Bank, SE1 (020 7452 3000).*

Peer Gynt Frank McGuinness provides a new version of Ibsen's epic folk tale in which the braggart hero embarks on a journey of self-discovery that takes him through several fortunes & countries until he returns to Norway & his true love. Sorcha Cusack & Ronald Pickup are among the cast with Conall Morrison directing. *Olivier, National Theatre, South Bank, SE1 (020 7452 3000).*

Remembrance of Things Past Harold Pinter's unfilmed 1972 screenplay based on Proust's partly autobiographical memory epic is adapted for the stage by Di Trevis. Time, desire, love, jealousy, art & loss are all explored through one man's physical & emotional journey through life. *Opens Nov 23. Cottesloe, National Theatre, South Bank SE1 (020 7452 3000).*

A Servant to Two Masters Lee Hall's lively adaptation of Goldoni's 18th-century farce of untimely

killings, love & thwarted desire turns the darkly tinged original into a pacey & intelligent pantomime for adults. At the heart of Tim Supple's boisterous but controlled RSC production is a breathtakingly athletic performance by Jason Watkins as the moon-faced, machiavellian clown moonlighting with two masters who makes even the oldest jokes seem funny. *Dec 11-Jan 29. New Ambassadors, West St, WC2 (020 7836 6111). See box story, p65.*

The Seven Year Itch George Axelrod's 1950s play is now best remembered in Billy Wilder's film version in which Marilyn Monroe had problems with her skirt on a New York subway grating. That scene doesn't appear in this stage revival by film director Michael Radford (*Il Postino, White Mischief*) which sticks to the original play & stars Hollywood actress Daryl Hannah as the neighbour of a middle-aged man who fantasises about her while his family is on holiday. *Until Dec 16. Queen's, Shaftesbury Ave, W1 (020 7494 5040)*

The Tempest The play that is often seen as the Bard's farewell to the theatre also marks the final production at the Almeida before it closes for major renovation. Ian McDiarmid takes the role of Prospero, the exiled duke who uses guile & magic to exact his revenge. The company will return next February at the Old Vic in a new production of Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, starring Anna Friel. *Dec 7-Feb 17. Almeida Theatre, Almeida St, N1 (020 7359 4404).*

CHRISTMAS & CHILDREN'S SHOWS

The Adventures of Pinocchio An imaginative retelling by Lee Hall. *Nov 24-Jan 13. Lyric Hammersmith, King St, W6 (020 8741 2311).*

Beauty & the Beast A new version by poet Nigel Forde. *Nov 23-Feb 10. Polka Theatre, 240 The Broadway,*

One in a million: Jim Davidson, joined by his *Big Break* co-star John Virgo, leads the cast in a lavish, million-pound production of *Dick Whittington*

Eggs-travaganza: Olivier Award-winner Clive Rowe makes a dazzling dame in the title role of *Mother Goose*, at Hackney Empire



Wimbledon, SW19 (020 8543 4888).

A Christmas Carol A dance adaptation of Dickens' tale by Christopher Hampson, including acrobatics, stilt walking, juggling & special effects, with recorded narration by Eric Sykes. *Dec 21-Jan 6. Royal Festival Hall, South Bank Centre, SE1 (020 7960 4242).*

Cinderella A traditional panto by Roy Hudd & featuring Oliver's big-screen Artful Dodger, Jack Wild. *Dec 2-Jan 13. Greenwich Theatre, Crooms Hill, SE10 (020 8858 7755).*

Cinderella Russ Abbot turns ugly as a sister. *Dec 21-Jan 21. Churchill, Bromley, Kent (020 8460 6677).*

Dick Whittington Jim Davidson leads a £1 million family panto, with John Virgo as Captain Creep & Victor Spinetti as King Rat. *Dec 22-Jan 21. Hammersmith Apollo, Queen Caroline St, W6 (0870 606 3521).*

Jack & the Beanstalk A musical version for 3- to 6-year-olds. *Dec 13-Jan 6. Lyric Studio, Hammersmith, King St, W6 (020 8741 2311).*

Jack & the Beanstalk With Chris Jarvis, Kate Richie & Andy Ford. *Dec 8-Jan 14. Ashcroft, Croydon, Surrey (020 8688 9291).*

King Charming A Victorian pantomime performed in one of London's last surviving music halls. *Nov 30-Feb 11. Players' Theatre, Villiers St, WC2 (020 7839 1134).*

The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe Adrian Mitchell's RSC adaptation of CS Lewis' saga is revived. *Dec 7-Jan 28. Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Ave, EC1 (020 7863 8222).*

Messiah Desmond Olivier Dingle's National Theatre of Brent presents its unique version of The Nativity. *Opens Dec 15. Bush, Shepherd's Bush Green, W12 (020 8743 3388).*

Mother Goose Ebullient actor-singer Clive Rowe heads the cast. *Dec 8-Jan 6. Hackney Empire, 291 Mare St, E8 (020 8985 2424).*

Sleeping Beauty Bubble Theatre Company gives this fairy tale a wake-up call. *Opens Dec 12. Cochrane, Southampton Row, WC1 (020 7430 2500).*

The Snowman An enchanting staging of Raymond Briggs' tale returns for a third year. *Dec 12-Jan 6. Peacock Theatre, Portugal St, WC2 (020 7863 8222).*

Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs With Lionel Blair, Linda Lusardi & Mr Blobby. *Dec 8-Jan 21. Wimbledon Theatre, 93 The Broadway, SW19 (020 8540 0362).*

The Three Musketeers A swashbuckling new adaptation by Chris Hannan. *Nov 23-Jan 13. Young Vic, The Cut, SE1 (020 7928 6363).*

The Wizard of Oz Anita Dobson flies in as the Wicked Witch. *Dec 14-Jan 21. Richmond Theatre, Richmond, Surrey (020 8940 0088).*

Wright's revised staging of *The Nutcracker* (Dec 22-Jan 20). Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, WC2 (020 7304 4000).

OUT OF TOWN

BIRMINGHAM ROYAL BALLET
The Nutcracker Peter Wright's version of the Christmas favourite. Dec 20-30. The Lowry, Salford (0161 876 2000).

ENGLISH NATIONAL BALLET
Swan Lake / Les Sylphides / Voluntaries / Etudes Nov 21-25, Apollo, Oxford (0870 606 3502).
NORTHERN BALLET THEATRE
Dracula Nov 21-25, Derngate, Northampton (01604 624 811).

Romeo & Juliet Massimo Moricone's interpretation of the star-crossed lovers. Dec 5-9, Grand Theatre, Leeds (0113 222 6222).

RAMBERT DANCE COMPANY
Ghost Dances / 7DS / The Celebrated Soubrette Nov 29-Dec 2, Theatre Royal, Plymouth (01752 267222).

SCOTTISH BALLET
Aladdin The world première of this exotic new ballet. Dec 20-30. Festival Theatre, Edinburgh (0131 529 6000).

Swanning around: Sumptuous *Swan Lake*, top left, is offered by English National Ballet

War dance: MacMillan's *Gloria*, top right, is part of the Royal Ballet's winter season

That's all folk: Rambert's work, *Sergeant Early's Dream*, is based on British, Irish & American folk songs, left

Dance

English National Ballet offers seasonal lollipops with *The Nutcracker* & *Swan Lake*, as does the Royal Ballet which also revives Kenneth MacMillan's *Gloria* & Frederick Ashton's *Ondine*. Rambert Dance Company presents the London premières of Didy Veldman's Seven Deadly Sins-inspired *7DS* & Christopher Bruce's *Swansong*.

English National Ballet Derek Deane's ever-popular *Nutcracker* begins the company's London winter season. Dec 19-Jan 6. In the New Year, it presents Deane's *Swan Lake*, Jan 9-13, 18-20, & a triple bill of *Les Sylphides*, *Voluntaries* & *Etudes*. Jan 15 & 17. Coliseum, St Martin's Lane, WC2 (020 7632 8300).

Rambert Dance Company Programme one: The London première of Mat Ek's *She Was Black* to music by Gorecki, & Christopher Bruce's *Sergeant Early's Dream*, based on British, Irish & American folk songs, Nov 14-18. Programme two: The London débuts of Didy Veldman's *7DS*, based on the Seven Deadly Sins, Bruce's *Swansong* alternating with his *Moonshine*, danced to Bob Dylan, & Venezuelan choreographer Javier de Frutos' Las Vegas-inspired *The Celebrated Soubrette*, Nov 21-25. Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Ave, EC1 (020 7863 8000).
Royal Ballet Sylvie Guillem, Roberto Bolle, Irek Mukhamedov, Tamara Rojo & Igor Zelensky are among the guest artists in a winter season that includes Anthony Powell's sumptuous *Swan Lake* (in repertory until Dec 2) & a revival of Frederick Ashton's *Ondine* (until Dec 11). There is also a programme of Ashton's *La Valse*, Tudor's *Lilac Garden*, Kenneth MacMillan's World War I-inspired *Gloria* (Dec 1-20) & Peter



BELOW: ANTHONY CRICKMAY; LEFT: JOHN KNILL

Circus of the absurd

Nowadays when the circus comes to town, it's likely to have come from abroad. This year alone, London audiences have thrilled to Argentina's De La Guarda, Quebec's Cirque Eloize and Australia's Circus Oz, while multi-national troupe Cirque du Soleil pirouettes and somersaults its way to Battersea Power Station for its new acrobatic spectacular, *Quidam*, in December.

All these companies have helped to redefine the traditional circus, handing the bearded lady a razor and letting the animals go free while introducing everything from ballet to motorcycles into the Big Top. And yet, in the country where circus was born (when Philip Astley's one-ring equestrian feats dazzled audiences in 1768), we don't have a major "alternative" circus to fly, twirl or juggle the flag for Britain.

Part of the reason has been that British circus skills and innovation have, in the past, been stunted by scant resources and interest. The late-80s saw inventive circus-theatre companies such as Ra Ra Zoo and Circus Senso spring into life only to disappear a couple of years later due to dwindling skill levels and lack of funds. In the past year, however, Circus Space, Britain's largest circus-training school, has seen an increase in interest and funding. The beleaguered Millennium Dome's aerial show, one of its rare successes, featured 60 performers trained by the school which is also finding growing audiences for its cabaret showcases.

Now that new talent is being nurtured, a fresh style of presentation needs to be found. As Charles Holland, programme director of Circus Space, put it: "Traditional circus is like a firework display, it's all very nice, but you don't think about it afterwards." Bim Mason, director of Bristol's Circomedia, which offers courses in circus skills and physical theatre, believes English circus should be defined by comedy, "a dark, satirical and absurd kind of humour, like Monty Python".

So, this Christmas, be amazed by the sleek showmanship of Cirque du Soleil. Next year, however, be prepared for something completely different when the home-grown circus comes to town.

Cirque du Soleil's Quidam is at Battersea Power Station from December 14. For details telephone 020 7957 4090

IAN JOHNS



AL SEIB

CINEMA

Remakes and sequels seem to be on the Yuletide movie menu with *Bedazzled*, *Charlie's Angels & 102 Dalmatians*, though Jim Carrey in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* may prove to be the festive pull. Gwyneth Paltrow gets to sing in *Quests* (see p70). Arnold Schwarzenegger is cloned in *The Sixth Day*, and Bruce Willis gets together with the writer-director of *The Sixth Sense* for another tale with a twist. *Unbreakable*.

Charlie's Angels Numerous reports about on-set bickering & hordes of writers working on a troubled script suggested that creating this Hollywood remake of the 70s TV series was less than angelic. But Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore & Lucy Liu, playing the handsome female crimefighters trying to prevent the assassination of their boss, insist that they are the best of friends & never battled over costumes, hairstyles or screen time.

Commercial & music video director M.C. (or Joseph McGinty Mitchell to his mum) supplies the slick visuals. *Opens Nov 24*. **Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon** Two of Asia's biggest idols, Michelle Yeh (Pierce Brosnan's high-kicking sidekick in *Tomorrow Never Dies*) & Chow Yun-Fat (the monarch in *Jodie Foster's Anna & the King*), play samurai-esque fighters in 19th-century China who hunt down the killer of a police inspector & fall in love. What makes this martial arts romance unusual is that it's directed by Ang Lee, the Taiwanese-born film-maker of such character-driven movies as *Sense & Sensibility* & *The Ice Storm*. *Opens Jan 5*.

Family Man It's a *Wonderful Life*esque reworked again in a romantic comedy about love & ambition. Nicolas Cage plays a career-minded Manhattan stockbroker who wakes up one Christmas Day to find his life completely changed: living in a blue collar New Jersey suburb, he is married to his high school sweetheart (Teri Hatcher), saddled with two kids & a job in a tyre store, & has a few lessons to learn. *Opens Dec 22*.

Judy Berlin Like *American Beauty*,

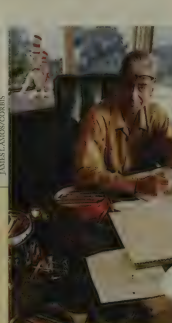
Object of desire: Mysterious Zhou Xun, above, steals the heart of a small-time crook in the haunting *Suzhou River*. **Action women:** Lucy Liu, Cameron Diaz & Drew Barrymore get feisty in the 70s series remake, bottom

this is an exploration of hope & despair in the suburbs. A hit at last year's Sundance festival for independent movies, it's set on Long Island on the day of a solar eclipse depicting what an aspiring actress (the wonderful Edie Falco, who plays the Mafia wife in *The Sopranos*) meets up with an old school friend (Michelle Yeh) who's back in town. Much of what made the original remake a box-office success—European locations, incredible costumes, well-trained puppets like as Cruella, now out of

resurfacer here as Cruella, now out of prison, resumes her quest for the ultimate Dalmatian coat, this time with the help of French fur designer Gérard Depardieu. *Opens Dec 8*. **Red Planet** Hoping not to crash & burn at the box-office like the earlier *Mission to Mars*, this action-adventure has a team of astronauts & scientists leaving an overpopulated & polluted Earth to set up a colony on the Red Planet. Val Kilmer (who annoyed many on the set by intrusively showing his own behind-the-scenes video), Tom Sizemore & *The Matrix's* Carrie-Anne Moss are among the explorers who find life on Mars is less than hospitable when a crash landing leaves them stranded. *Opens Dec 22*.

The Sixth Day Pilot Arnold Schwarzenegger gets a welcome birthday surprise when he arrives home to find he's been replaced by his clone & is forced to evade the DNA duplicator (Tony Goldwyn) who wants to keep his illegal dip into the gene pool a secret. Concealed long before the breakthrough of the Human Genome Project, this futuristic sci-fi thriller was revamped to bring its setting closer to the present day. *Opens Dec 15*.

Suzhou River This is an atmospheric love story with Hitchcockian overtones set in seedy Shanghai, where a small-time crook is caught up in gangsters' plans to kidnap a rich man's daughter & later falls in love with an elusive woman who looks like the kidnaper victim. *Opens Nov 17*. **Unbreakable** Writer-director M. Night Shyamalan follows his unexpected worldwide hit *The Sixth Sense* with an unusual suspense thriller. Bruce Willis plays the sole survivor of a train wreck who meets a mysterious stranger (Samuel L. Jackson) with a degenerative bone disease who knows why he emerged unscathed. Expect another startling plot twist. *Opens Jan 8*.



LOUIS L'AMOUR

Bah humbug! Dr Seuss's Grinch is back

Watch out. This Christmas your children may succumb to *Seuss Fever*. Symptoms include the urge to speak in goofy rhymes, invent weird names for animals, balance precariously stacked boxes on one finger and hurtle down a mountain in a car the size of a turtle. It's already infected children in America where, nine years after his death, Pulitzer Prize-winning artist and children's author Theodor Seuss Geisel—better known as Dr Seuss, pictured right—is enjoying renewed popularity for his anarchic and wittily inventive books, including *Green Eggs and Ham* and his 1957 breakthrough story, *The Cat in the Hat*.

Not only are his books running riot once again on the bestsellers list, but there is also a Broadway musical, *Seussical*, and the aforementioned gibberish-rhyming felix with the top hat and scarf is about to be filmed for the big screen. The reason for this re-Seussification has mainly been due to the interest generated by Ron Howard's screen adaptation of Seuss's 1957 tale, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, starring Jim Carrey. It's a classic tale in which the hyperactive Carrey plays a Scrooge-like goblin who snags his town of its holiday traditions, presents and all, only to find that goodwill to all men still survives.

Geisel's widow, Audrey, recalls meeting Carrey on the set of his film *Man on the Moon*. "As I was leaving, he put his hands on shoulders, beamed me in the eyes and screeched 'I've been into such a wicked snail that I passed, 'My God, it's the Grinch!'" Director Ron Howard relished with his *Apollo 13* production designer Michael Cornblith to create elaborate, stylized sets for *Winchell* which had originally been inspired by the famous spiral ramp of New York's Guggenheim Museum and by a lesser-known 1949 Seuss book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, filled with zany circular stairways and crooked bell towers. "Geisel soaked these images up from medieval and Moorish architecture," says Cornblith, who constructed 50ft-high bridges between Whoville's buildings. A "spooky Norman Rockwell quality" has also been brought to the costumes.

Geisel would surely have approved. As he once said: "I'll like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living. It is a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope... It enables you to laugh at life's realities."

The Grinch Who Stole Christmas opens in cinemas from December 1.

IAN JOHNS

MUSIC

Among the usual festive offerings, José Carreras, Kiri Te Kanawa (see p70) & Albert Garrett each sing a personal selection of songs & arias at the Albert Hall. Berlioz, Alfred Schnittke & Aaron Copland are celebrated at the Barbican, & Simon Rattle, Evelyn Glennie & Courtney Pine ensure that there is a broad musical choice on the South Bank.

ALBERT HALL

Kenning Group, SW2 (0207589 8212). **Classical Spectacular** Arrangements include Rossini, Bizet, Wagner, Tchaikovsky & Verdi accompanied by the choir & lasers, featuring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Band of the Welsh Guards & the Markets & Cannons of the Moscow Militia. Dec 16-19. **Emmylou Harris** Literate country music from the

royal choir. **Royal Choral Society** Christmas Carols. With Fanfare Trumpeters from the Grenadier Guards & the London

Concert Orchestra is joined by soprano Judith Howarth for, among others, Verdi, Puccini & Elgar. Dec 31.

Also, with tenor Justin Lavender, baritone Graeme Danby & pianist John Lenehan, pieces by Strauss, Holst, Bizet, Gershwin & Ravel. Jan 1.

Alfred Schnittke A weekend devoted to one of Russia's leading composers, including a selection of string quartets, chamber & vocal music, the UK

premiere of Symphony No 8, & Leonard Slatkin conducting proceedings with the *Faust Cantata* & Symphony No 3. Jan 12-14.

Concert Orchestra, Dec 21. **Carols by Candlelight** Festive music from Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn, Handel & Corelli performed by the Mozart Festival Orchestra & Chorus. Dec 24. **Barbican Hall**

Silk Street, EC1 (020 7638 8891). **Copland Weekend** Celebrating the centenary of Aaron Copland's birth with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra & BBC Singers under Leonard Slatkin. Works include *Inscape*, *Billy the Kid*, *The Tender Land* & the UK premiere of his suite *The Heires*. Nov 10-12. **Mikhail Pletner** The incisive pianist plays Beethoven & Chopin. Nov 26.

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra Mozart, Berg & Tchaikovsky conducted by James Levine. Nov 28. **Berlioz Odyssey** Colin Davis conducts the London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus in concert stagings of both parts of the epic opera *The Trojans*. Dec 3, 6, 7, 9-9. **BBC Symphony Orchestra** Soprano Barbara Bonney joins conductor Emmanuel Krivine for Faure, Britten & Debussy. Dec 13.

London Community Gospel Choir Soulful, gospel & traditional songs for Christmas. Dec 19. **Dave Brubeck** The venerable jazz pianist celebrates his 80th birthday with his band & the London Symphony Orchestra. Dec 21 & 23. **London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus** Richard Hickox conducts a mix of traditional & modern music for Christmas. Dec 21-23. John Georgiadis leads a traditional Strauss line-up of polkas & marches for the New Year. Dec 31, Jan 1.

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veteran performer. Nov 20. **José Carreras** The much-loved tenor sings some of his favourite arias, songs & carols. Dec 12. **Christmas Carol Singalong** Two afternoon family concerts led by Jonathan Cohen, with the London Concert Orchestra & London Choral Society. Dec 16. **Messiah** Noel Davies conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra & the Huddersfield Choral Society. Dec 16. The LPO performs again with the London Choral Society, Goldsmith Choral Union & Highgate Choral Society. Dec 23. **Bach Choir Family Carols** The choir is joined by the Wallace Collection & the Fanfare Trumpeters from the Military School of Music at Knelier Hall. Dec 17.

King's College Choir The choir performs with the Philharmonia Orchestra for Bach's *Gloria in Excelsis* Den, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Corelli's *Christmas Concerto* & carols for all. Dec 18.

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Chamber Orchestra of Europe Beethoven's Symphony No 6 & Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances* Nos 1-4, conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Nov 23. **The Whirling Dervishes of Damascus** An evening of Sufi music & dance. Nov 27-28. **The Ted Heath Band** Swing & big band golden oldies. Dec 4. **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra** Simon Rattle conducts Haydn, Berg & Beethoven. Dec 7.

Christmas Crazier BBC Concert Orchestra, City of London Choir & Guildford Choral Society perform excerpts from Handel's *Messiah* & Zadek the Priest, Berlin's *Winter* Christmas, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kije* & carols for choir & audience. Dec 11, 14. **BBC Concert Orchestra** Percussionist Evelyn Glennie is soloist for a contemporary programme, including Jeffes, Maxwell Davies & Heath. Jan 7.

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premiere of Symphony No 8, & Leonard Slatkin conducting proceedings with the *Faust Cantata* & Symphony No 3. Jan 12-14.

Concert Orchestra, Dec 21. **Carols by Candlelight** Festive music from Vivaldi, Mozart, Haydn, Handel & Corelli performed by the Mozart Festival Orchestra & Chorus. Dec 24. **Barbican Hall**

Silk Street, EC1 (020 7638 8891). **Copland Weekend** Celebrating the centenary of Aaron Copland's birth with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra & BBC Singers under Leonard Slatkin. Works include *Inscape*, *Billy the Kid*, *The Tender Land* & the UK premiere of his suite *The Heires*. Nov 10-12. **Mikhail Pletner** The incisive pianist plays Beethoven & Chopin. Nov 26.

Munich Philharmonic Orchestra Mozart, Berg & Tchaikovsky conducted by James Levine. Nov 28. **Berlioz Odyssey** Colin Davis conducts the London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus in concert stagings of both parts of the epic opera *The Trojans*. Dec 3, 6, 7, 9-9. **BBC Symphony Orchestra** Soprano Barbara Bonney joins conductor Emmanuel Krivine for Faure, Britten & Debussy. Dec 13.

London Community Gospel Choir Soulful, gospel & traditional songs for Christmas. Dec 19. **Dave Brubeck** The venerable jazz pianist celebrates his 80th birthday with his band & the London Symphony Orchestra. Dec 21 & 23. **London Symphony Orchestra & Chorus** Richard Hickox conducts a mix of traditional & modern music for Christmas. Dec 21-23. John Georgiadis leads a traditional Strauss line-up of polkas & marches for the New Year. Dec 31, Jan 1.

Glenn Miller Orchestra The band that continues the band leader's swing sound is joined by veteran Hollywood hoopers the Clark Brothers. Dec 27. **Mozart Festival Orchestra** Performed in traditional costume by candlelight, Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* (Dec 28) & a Mozart selection (Dec 29). **New Year Proms** The London Concert Orchestra is joined by soprano Judith Howarth for, among others, Verdi, Puccini & Elgar. Dec 31.

Also, with tenor Justin Lavender, baritone Graeme Danby & pianist John Lenehan, pieces by Strauss, Holst, Bizet, Gershwin & Ravel. Jan 1.

Alfred Schnittke A weekend devoted to one of Russia's leading composers, including a selection of string quartets, chamber & vocal music, the UK premiere of Symphony No 8, & Leonard Slatkin conducting proceedings with the *Faust Cantata* & Symphony No 3. Jan 12-14.



A little bit country: Veteran singer Emmylou Harris delivers literate country music at the Albert Hall, top

How does this grab you? Jazz saxophonist Courtney Pine, left, plays numbers from his new album at the Festival Hall

Chamber music: Dvorak & Beethoven are on the menu for the Chamber Orchestra of Europe's Festival Hall appearance, above

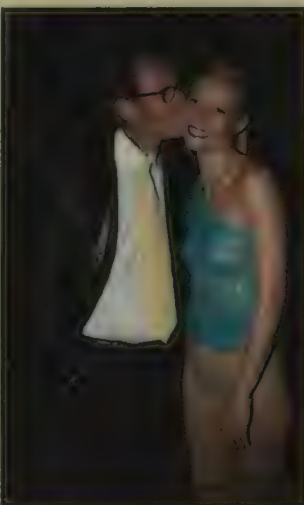
Follow that Star

Some of the biggest names in showbiz and the arts are performing for your pleasure this Christmas

GWYNETH PALTROW

The Oscar that Gwyneth Paltrow won last year for *Shakespeare in Love* is somewhere in storage as the 27-year-old Hollywood star has hardly been home to Los Angeles in the past 18 months. In that time she's made *The Talented Mr Ripley*, the forthcoming romance *Bounce*, with former flame Ben Affleck, and the ensemble comedy-drama *Duets*, about several karaoke-obsessives heading for a talent contest in Nebraska, directed by her father, Bruce.

Currently in Britain shooting the screen version of A S Byatt's novel *Possession*, Paltrow hopes to be in London for *Duets* when it opens here on December 1. Making the film was an intensely moving experience because her father



KARIN O'FLOTTA/CAMERA PRESS



STEPHEN SONDHEIM

With shows such as *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *Pacific Overtures* and *Sweeney Todd*, Stephen Sondheim put brains and heart back into the increasingly anodyne American musical. But even though he's won every major award going, and created along the way an incomparably diverse song catalogue, which has attracted everyone from Frank Sinatra and Barbra Streisand to Madonna, he's had his fair share of high-profile flops as well as money-makers. Having turned 70 this year, he ruefully remarked: "I'm still essentially a cult figure. My work is too unexpected for the general public."

Sondheim has reached a wider audience in Britain, thanks in part to the Donmar Warehouse's incisive stagings of such shows as *Company* and *Into the Woods*. Now the composer is eagerly awaiting Michael Grandage's revival of his 1981 musical *Merrily We Roll Along* at the same venue.

Although it flopped on Broadway, the show, which is about the friendship of two songwriters and a novelist, and unfolds backwards from middle-age to innocent youth, has attracted many devotees. It also features some of Sondheim's most beautiful and accessible songs of love and regret, including "Not a Day Goes By", "Old Friends" and "Our Time".

Ironically, the two songwriters we see at the end of the show are similar to many eager young artists who regularly seek Sondheim's advice today: "I tell them, write your musical and put it on any place you can. I warn them that Broadway is no longer an outlet for new work. I'm lucky I get my shows on." Lucky, too, that London still appreciates a composer whose work may often not be easy but is always memorable.

Merrily We Roll Along opens on Dec 11 at the Donmar Warehouse—see theatre listings, p65.

JESSICA LANGE

Unlike Kathleen Turner, Daryl Hannah and Macaulay Culkin, who've all trod the capital's boards this year with varying degrees of success, Oscar-winning actress Jessica Lange is not a London stage novice. Having proved herself three years ago in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, she returns to the West End as the morphine-addicted wife Mary Tyrone in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Like her husband, playwright Sam Shepard, who spent the early 70s in London writing and gaining critical acclaim on the Fringe, she adores London, so spending Christmas here instead of at their home in rural Minnesota won't be too much of a wrench.

She's relishing the challenge of her new stage role in the O'Neill play. "The Tyrone are haunted by ghosts, of things that never became. It's all highly emotional," she says. "Being on the screen can be tough, but theatre is the real test."

Now in her early 50s, Lange says she needs to have an emotional connection with a project—something she finds increasingly scarce in America. "Most of the film studios are run by lawyers and accountants, they are not passionate people," she says. That's why she's extending her stay in London to make a film version of the Colette novel, *Cheri*, about a fading courtesan and her love for a boy. Hollywood's loss is our gain.

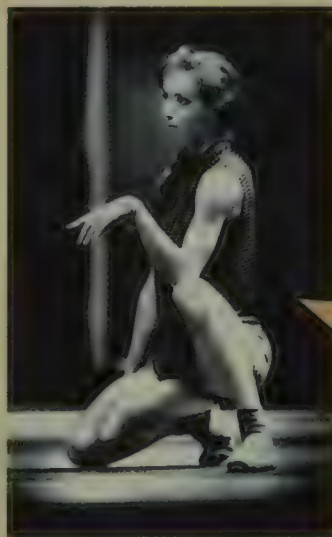
Long Day's Journey Into Night opens at the Lyric on Nov 21—see theatre listings, p65.



THE O'HOREWOOD/CAMERA PRESS

SYLVIE GUILLEM

"I love the English sense of humour," says French ballet star Sylvie Guillem, one of the dance world's busiest guest artists. "Not pantomime, which is quite obvious, but what we call *humeur anglais*. It's so subtle." She'll be offering subtle entertainment this December with the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden when she performs Antony Tudor's 1936 piece, *Lilac*



ARENA IMAGES

Garden, dancing the role of a young woman who is forced to say farewell to her lover on the eve of an arranged marriage.

"The Royal Ballet is a company that loves what it is doing. I still respect it a lot, even after 11 years," she says. As a principal guest artist of the Royal Ballet, she was able to pick and choose from the repertoire, taking on such roles as Odette, Giselle, Cinderella and Manon and moulding them to suit herself. She recently signed another contract that continues her association with the company for the next five years.

Although, at the age of 35, she is professionally in her waning years (a dancer's life is harshly short), Guillem still relishes her work and the year ahead, which includes collaborations with contemporary choreographers such as Mats Ek and Maurice Béjart. "I prefer the way it is now—the intensity," Guillem says. "Older is better. You have wisdom, maturity, you have experiences, and you want to live all the minutes."

Lilac Garden is in repertory at the Royal Opera House, Dec 1-20—see dance listings, p67.

completed the movie while recovering from throat cancer.

"I learned how much strength of character he had," she says. "I always knew I had a very special man as a father, but I never knew quite how great he was."

As a starstruck Vegas showgirl in *Duets*, Paltrow gets to croon a few songs, including "Bette Davis Eyes" and the Temptations' "Just My Imagination". "I knew how well Gwyneth could sing," says her proud father. "When she and her mother sing together, you just can't believe it."

Duets has two screenings at the London Film Festival on Nov 14 & 15 at the Odeon West End—telephone 020 7928 3232 for details. It opens at cinemas nationwide from Nov 17.

DAME KIRI TE KANAWA



TOBY WALES/REDFERNS

The Spirit of Christmas Television Past could show you that a yuletide TV appearance by superlative soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa singing Handel in a huge frock used to be as inevitable as the Queen's Speech. This festive season, however, she can be seen at the Albert Hall in a recital of her favourite songs and arias. Although she doesn't like to confirm the repertoire until nearer the time, it promises to be a diverse selection drawn from a singing career that has embraced opera, jazz, pop and, most recently, Maori songs from her native New Zealand.

Next year, she'll perform Samuel Barber's opera *Vanessa* in Monte Carlo, record a selection of Noel Coward numbers and pursue a recent passion for South American songs. Four years shy of her 60th birthday, when she intimated she would retire, the personable diva looks set to continue well beyond that: "I'll go on singing for a long time yet. I have a lot of things I still want to do. Anyway, look at Tina Turner, she's turned 60 and she's still wonderful."

Kiri Te Kanawa gives a recital of contrasting pieces at the Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, SW7, on Dec 13. Telephone 020 7589 8212.

JOOLS HOLLAND

Currently on tour proving that he is the Horowitz of boogie-woogie, pianist and broadcaster Jools Holland brings his 13-piece Rhythm and Blues Orchestra to the Albert Hall this season. With his infectious enthusiasm, ready charm and easy wit, he attracts audiences that range from children to pensioners. "The great thing about live gigs is that you can reach young and old," he says, "weaving the same magic on them as the music weaves on me."

Last year, he saw in the New Year playing at the Millennium Dome, although it was handily near his house in Greenwich, not far from his childhood home, which he shares with his sculptress wife Christabel, her son Fred and their daughter Mabel. This year, he'll be hosting the New Year's edition of his eclectic music show, *Later With Jools Holland*, in which eager young bands rub shoulders with their musical heroes and heroines.

But don't feel sorry that Holland is working on yet another New Year's Eve—the programme is recorded in early December. "Later is not about fashion or being trendy," he explains, "the music is what's important. It has a truth and a beauty which I think we manage to express."

Although some musicians lose their female fans as they get older, Holland is the reverse. Last year he was voted the world's most alluring man in a *Harpers & Queen* poll and he admits he is happiest in middle age: "Ever since I was five, I've wanted to be in my 40s. I always thought it would be good to be grown-up because you get things sorted out."

Jools Holland plays at the Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, SW7, on Nov 30 & Dec 1. Telephone 020 7589 8212.

IAN JOHNS



OPERA

English National Opera offers a double dose of Verdi with *Nabucco* & the *Requiem* while directorial double act Patrice Caurier & Moshe Leiser make their Royal Opera débuts with Rossini's *La Cenerentola* & English Festival Opera stages *Die Fledermaus* for the Christmas season.

ENGLISH FESTIVAL OPERA
Royal Festival Hall, South Bank
Centre, SE1 (020 7960 4242).

Die Fledermaus Johann Strauss' Viennese operetta, staged by Tom Hawkes, features Naomi Harvey, Constance Novis, Mark Evans, & the London City Opera & Chorus.
Dec 26-Jan 1.

ENGLISH NATIONAL OPERA
London Coliseum, St Martin's Lane,
WC2 (020 7632 8300).

The Prisoner Dallapiccola's 20th-century opera about the hopes & fears of a political prisoner is preceded by Luciano Berio's cycle of 11 pieces, *Folk Songs*, & a new staging of Nino Rota's *La Strada*. In repertory Nov 17-Dec 13.

Nabucco The chorus of Hebrew Slaves rises again in Verdi's career-launching epic. David Pountney directs his own translation. Bruno Caproni makes his ENO début in the title role. In repertory Nov 30-Dec 15.

Verdi's Requiem Phyllida Lloyd's new staging, sung in Latin, includes soprano Claire Weston, mezzo-soprano Susan Parry & tenor Rafael Rojas. In repertory Dec 9-16.

ROYAL OPERA
Covent Garden, WC2 (020 7304 4000).

La Traviata Richard Eyre's Verdi production, designed by Bob



Bone-chilling: Compulsive gambler Herman is visited by a spine-tingling apparition in Welsh National Opera's *The Queen of Spades*

Haunting: Joan Rodgers, below, gives a stirring performance in Opera North's version of Debussy's *Pelléas and Mélisande*

Crowley, has Elena Kelessedi as Violetta, Giuseppe Sabbatini (Giuseppe Filianoti from Dec 11) as Alfredo & Thomas Allen as Giorgio Germont. In repertory Nov 24-Dec 29.

La Cenerentola Directors Patrice Caurier and Moshe Leiser, best known for their Welsh National Opera productions, make their Royal Opera début with Rossini's work. Italian mezzo-soprano Sonia Ganassi takes the title role, with Sophie Koch as Angelina & Simone Alaimo as Don Magnifico. In repertory Dec 16-Mar 17.

Falstaff Graham Vick's colourful staging of Verdi's opera has baritone Paolo Gavanelli as Shakespeare's portly hero, Patricia Schuman as Alice & Simon Keenlyside as her jealous husband. In repertory Jan 12-30.

OUT OF TOWN

OPERA NORTH

Grand Theatre, Leeds (0113 222 6222)

Pelléas and Mélisande Richard Jones directs Debussy's haunting masterpiece, with Joan Rodgers & William Dazeley in the title roles. Jan 10, 13, 18.

WELSH NATIONAL OPERA

Orpheus and Eurydice Gluck's most popular opera, in a version directed by Patrice Caurier & Moshe Leiser. With Katarina Karneus & Natalie Christie in the title roles.

Carmen Caurier & Leiser's staging of Bizet's tale of treachery, passion & betrayal has Beth Clayton in the title role.

The Queen of Spades

Tchaikovsky's adaptation of Pushkin's novella about an obsessive gambler is directed by Richard Jones.

Running in repertory: Nov 14-18, Grand Opera House, Belfast (02890 241 919); Nov 28-Dec 2, Hippodrome, Bristol (0870 607 7500).



NIGHTMARE ADAM/REDFERNS



SPORT

No Christmas season in London would be complete without the Olympia showjumping event or the traditional Boxing Day race meeting at Kempton Park. Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe & other tennis greats compete in the Albert Hall, & British bobsleigh competitors hurtle down slippery slopes.

BOBSLEIGH

British eyes will be on Sean Olsson & his crew in the four-man bobs, & the nation's top two-woman team of Michelle Coy & Sheryl Done.

European Championships Jan 16-21. Königssee, Bavaria, Germany (01722 340014).

British Bobsleigh Championship Jan 9-14. Winterberg, nr Düsseldorf, Germany (01722 340014).

CROSS COUNTRY

As current European title-holder, Britain will be trying to retain the top position in the men's team event, with Jon Brown attempting to better his third place in last year's individual championship. Athletes invited to the Durham event will include the talented Kenyan runners & many top European competitors.

Spar European Cross-Country Championships Dec 10. Malmö, Sweden (0121 456 5098).

IAAF International Cross-Country Meeting Dec 30. Durham (0121 456 5098).

EQUESTRIANISM

Robert Smith, Michael & John Whitaker & a host of other top riders compete at Olympia in events that are often given a Christmas flavour. Extra attractions include the spectacular ride of the King's Troop, & a demonstration of daring equestrian stunts by French horseman Lorenzo. Olympia International Showjumping Championships Dec 14-18. Olympia, W14 (0870 848 0000).

<www.olympiashowjumping.com>

RUGBY UNION

The arrival of world champions Australia & previous world champions South Africa should ensure some exciting matches against



Out on a limb: Will Britain's Jon Brown, above, manage to better his third place in last year's European Cross-Country Championships?

Fast four: the British bobsleigh team take to the slopes, below

British & Irish home teams. Scotland v Australia Nov 11, Murrayfield, Edinburgh (0131 346 5000); England v Australia Nov 18, Twickenham, Middx (020 8831 6691); Ireland v South Africa Nov 19, Lansdowne Road, Dublin (+353 1 668 4601); Wales v South Africa Nov 26, Millennium Stadium, Cardiff (0990 582 582); England v South Africa Dec 2, Twickenham.

TENNIS

McEnroe, Borg, Nastase, Wilander, Cash & other great tennis names compete in the final event of a world tour of 14 countries.

Honda Challenge Dec 6-10. Royal Albert Hall, Kensington Gore, SW7 (020 7589 8212).



St Petersburg on Thames

The imperial splendour of St Petersburg's Winter Palace has been recreated in the heart of London. Within Somerset House—already home to the great Courtauld and Gilbert collections—a new permanent exhibition space opens a window on to Russian art and history, bringing to the capital a series of changing exhibitions of treasures from Russia's State Hermitage Museum.

Inside a suite of sumptuously decorated rooms, a series of marquetry floors, gilded chairs and elegant chandeliers conjure up 18th-century Russia. From the moment they arrive and behold Alexander Roslin's full-length portrait of Catherine the Great, visitors are plunged into the world of tsars and tsarinas.

Born in 1729, Catherine was wed at 16 to the heir to the Russian throne. Finding her marriage unsatisfactory, she indulged in the first of many love affairs before her husband was proclaimed Peter III in 1762. Almost immediately the new emperor took office, Catherine helped her lover, Count Grigori Orlov, and others overthrow him and arrange his assassination.

Over the next 35 years she reigned as empress, encouraging the visual arts and transforming St Petersburg into the most glittering capital of Europe. She purchased works of every sort—from Poussin and Watteau to Rembrandt and Rubens, from chinoiserie to Sèvres porcelain. The 500 treasures on show in London include priceless paintings, exquisite furniture, inlaid ivory hunting rifles, engraved gems and specially commissioned cameos.

On another floor of Somerset House, the Gilbert Collection of decorative arts complements the Hermitage show by focusing on its own dazzling Russian pieces. Solid gold items from St Petersburg, lavishly decorated jewelled snuffboxes, mosaic table-tops and religious works of art illustrate the craftsmanship in the city at this fertile period in its history.

Treasures of Catherine the Great. November 25-September 23, 2001, Hermitage Rooms; Gilbert Collection; Somerset House, Strand, WC2 (020 7845 4630). Mon-Sat 10am-6pm; Sun noon-6pm. Closed Dec 24-26 and Jan 1.

ANGELA BIRD



EXHIBITIONS

Among winter treats for Londoners are the opening of the British Museum's huge Great Court, & the magnificent Hermitage Rooms in Somerset House, which are designed to show off treasures from St Petersburg. Elsewhere, great names in British art & literature are examined in depth: Oscar Wilde at the British Library & the Barbican; JMW Turner at the Royal Academy, & William Blake at the Tate Britain.

Readers are advised to check dates & times before making a special journey.

BARBICAN ART GALLERY

Barbican Centre, EC2 (020 7382 7105).

The Wilde Years: Oscar Wilde & the Art of His Time The centenary of the death of this writer & aesthete is celebrated with an exploration of Wilde's achievements, shedding new light on his work as art critic, journalist & progressive political thinker. Until Jan 14.

Rock Style: music+fiction+attitude Costumes, photographs, videos &

music show how rock-&-roll performers—from the Beatles & Mick Jagger to Madonna & Courtney Love—have influenced 20th-century style & fashion. Until Jan 14.

Mon-Sat 10am-6pm (Wed until 8pm); Sun noon-6pm. Closed Dec 24 & 25.

BRITISH LIBRARY

96 Euston Rd, NW1 (020 7412 7332).

Oscar Wilde: The centenary exhibition Highlight of the documents & other items on display will be the autographed manuscript of *De Profundis*, Wilde's confessional letter from prison to his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas. Nov 10-Feb 4. Mon-Fri 9.30am-6pm (Tues until 8pm); Sat 9.30am-5pm; Sun 11am-5pm. Closed Dec 24-27 & Jan 1.

BRITISH MUSEUM

Great Russell St, WC1 (020 7636 1555).

The Human Image The new Great Court space, created by roofing over the museum's former inner courtyard, opens with an exhibition of representations of the human form across 14,000 years, including drawing by palaeolithic hunters in France, contemporary hunters of Alaska & Australia & other designs

Changing rooms: decades of décor at MoDA

One of the world's most comprehensive collections of decorative arts for the home has gone on display in north London, offering a fascinating insight into the changing world of interior decoration and domestic life in the last two centuries.

The new Museum of Domestic Design & Architecture (MoDA), at Middlesex University, contains an outstanding display of furnishings, trade brochures, magazines and books dating from 1860 to 1960.

The permanent exhibition focuses on the first half of the 20th century, highlighting decorative styles, the use of living space, and the major innovations that revolutionised home life, particularly with the advent of electricity. Photographs and personal memories reveal the reality of home life while displays of fabrics and wallpapers, catalogues of fixtures and fittings, and advertisements for household equipment demonstrate the choices available at the time.

One of the museum's highlights is the collection from the Silver Studio, a leading London design group whose works—wallpapers, textiles, rugs—found their way into many British homes from the 1880s to the 1960s. An important member of the Silver Studio's creative team was Archibald Knox, the subject of MoDA's first temporary exhibition. Knox, a native of the Isle of Man, was one of the most influential designers of the 1890s and early 1900s and a significant contributor to the English Art Nouveau style. He was best known for his Celtic-inspired silver and pewter ware.

MoDA has been part of Middlesex University for over 20 years, but it is the first time its collection has gone on display thanks to the new, Heritage Lottery-funded space.

MoDA is located at the Bounds Green campus of Middlesex University (020 8411 5244). Tues-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun 2-5pm. Closed Dec 24-Jan 1. Archibald Knox at the Silver Studio, until Feb 9. Admission free.

CLAIRE HUTCHINGS



depicted narrative, rapid movement & the fleeting moment in their paintings—from the near-comic strips of Hogarth to paintings by Dégas & Munch that appear to have been influenced by photography. Until Jan 14.

Impression: Painting quickly in France, 1860-90 The rapid, improvisatory style pioneered by Edouard Manet shocked the art establishment of the day. More than 60 paintings by him & by his followers—Monet, Morisot, Renoir & Sisley—show how Manet inspired other artists, while a selection of works by Van Gogh demonstrate how he, too, experimented with the same technique. Until Jan 28.

Daily 10am-6pm (Wed until 9pm).

Closed Dec 24-26 & Jan 1.

ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

Piccadilly, W1 (020 7300 8000).

The Great Watercolours of JMW Turner Commemorative exhibition,

marking the 150th anniversary of Turner's death, showing country-house drawings & highly detailed watercolours from Picturesque Views of England & Wales, which are considered the finest views of British scenery ever made. Dec 2-Feb 11.

Daily 10am-6pm (Fri until 8.30pm).

Closed Dec 25 & Jan 1.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART

Kensington Gore, SW7 (020 7590 4186).

RCA Secret The eagerly-awaited annual opportunity to buy one of 1,500 postcards on show, for £35, that might turn out to be from the hand of a contemporary master or by a hitherto unknown artist. Viewing Nov 22-29, 10am-6pm (Thurs until 8pm); sale Nov 30-Dec 2, Thurs 8am-8pm; Fri, Sat 10am-6pm.

TATE BRITAIN

Millbank, SW1 (020 7887 8008).

William Blake Around 400 works by the unique & innovative 19th-century Romantic British artist & poet. His personal symbolism & interest in medieval art are explored, & illuminated books, documentary material & work by his contemporaries show Blake in the context of the French Revolution & other political upheavals of his time. Nov 9-Feb 11.

VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

Cromwell Rd, SW7 (020 7938 8349).

Brand.New A series of installations takes a look at brand names & contemporary culture as well as at global marketing (such as Coca Cola), & investigates the promises that brands make as well as our own responses to them in the clothes we wear & the items we regularly use in our homes. Until Jan 14. Daily 10am-5.45pm (Wed until 9.30pm). Closed Dec 24-26 & Jan 1.

Poetry in paint: Tate Britain stages a major exhibition of the Romantic British artist and poet William Blake

Box of tricks: Tom Phillips' cube was chosen for The Discerning Eye 1999—who will the panel pick this year?

MALL GALLERIES

17 Carlton House Terrace, SW1

(020 7930 6844).

The Discerning Eye 2000

Contemporary paintings & sculptures selected by Peter Blake, Sally Bulgin, Emma Sergeant, Frank Whitford, Michael Parkinson & Colin Tweedy. Nov 24-Dec 3. Daily 10am-5pm.

NATIONAL GALLERY

Trafalgar Sq, WC2 (020 7747 2885).

Telling Time A look at the way artists

from Africa to the Far East, Ancient Greece to the Americas. Dec 7-Feb 11. **Gladiators & Caesars: The power of spectacle in Ancient Rome** This look at the Roman entertainment industry tells the history of chariot races, plays & gladiatorial games, & includes many film screenings. Until Jan 21. Mon-Sat 10am-5pm; Sun noon-6pm. Closed Dec 24-26 & Jan 1.

HACKNEY STUDIOS

Various venues, East London (020 7729 3301).

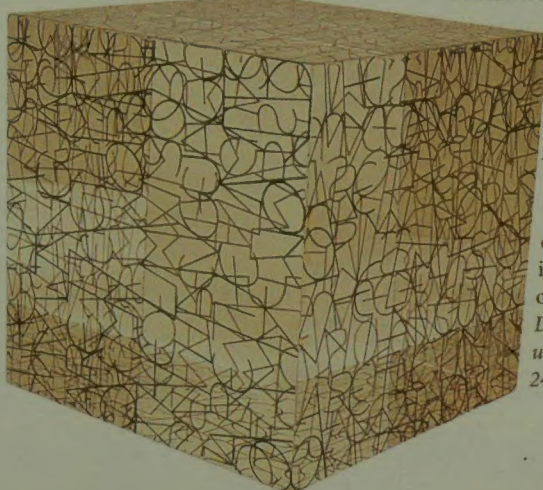
Hidden Art Britain's leading open studios event gives browsers a chance to buy or to commission objects, furniture, jewellery, ceramics & other works direct from some 350 artists & designers in their own workplaces, which are scattered throughout Hackney, Clerkenwell & Mile End. Nov 25, 26, Dec 2, 3. Sat 10am-6pm; Sun noon-6pm (maps from 020 7729 3301 or via the website <www.hiddenart.co.uk>)

HAYWARD GALLERY

South Bank, SE1 (020 7928 3144).

Spectacular Bodies: The art & science of the human body from Leonardo to now Paintings, sculptures & anatomical models illustrate the ways in which medicine & art have coincided over the last five centuries. Until Jan 14.

Daily 10am-6pm (Tues, Wed until 8pm). Closed Dec 24-26 & Jan 1.



CAFÉ ROYAL BY SIR TERRY FROST



OTHER EVENTS

Christmas past is celebrated at the **Geffrye Museum** & at **Hampton Court**. For today's festivities, there are opportunities to pick up unusual gifts at the **Royal Horticultural Society's flower show** & at some of London's top antiques & crafts fairs. Those looking to future challenges will find holidays & equipment galore at the **Adventure Travel Show**.

Winter Olympia Fine Art & Antiques Fair Fine furniture & works of art, glass, tapestries, maps, jewellery, statuary & a host of other items on sale from 230 distinguished international dealers. A loan exhibition of English & Continental porcelain custard cups dating from 1735 to 1850 will be the centrepiece of the show, which also features lectures on art, cutlery, Ming porcelain & 18th-century English furniture. Nov 13-19. Mon 5-10pm; Tues 11am-9pm; Wed-Fri 11am-8pm; Sat 11am-7pm; Sun 11am-5pm. Olympia, W14 (020 7370 8345).

20th-Century British & Irish Art Among works on sale is Barbara Hepworth's bronze *Sea Form* (estimated at £180,000 to £220,000). Others represented include Irish artist Walter Osbourne, Newlyn painter Stanhope Alexander Forbes, & Lancashire artist Helen Bradley. Nov 21. Phillips, 101 New Bond St, W1 (020 7629 6602).

Christmas Crafts Fair The elegant Edwardian interior of the English Speaking Union's Mayfair

headquarters is the new venue for the Richmond Fellowship's prestigious annual crafts fair. Beneath the painted ceilings, top craftsmen & women sell everything from handbags to glassware, jewellery to designer clothing. Nov 25, 26, 10am-5pm. Dartmouth House, 37 Charles St, W1 (020 7697 3357).

Christmas Past In a quest to show the true spirit of Christmas, the Geffrye dresses its period room-settings to show 400 years of seasonal tradition in English homes.

Associated events include a card & decoration workshop on Dec 9, a candlelit tour on Dec 14, a concert of Christmas music on Dec 19 &, outside in the garden, the traditional burning of the holly at 4pm on Twelfth Night, Jan 6. Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Rd, E2 (020 7739 9893).

Home-Made Christmas A Tudor house in London's East End is the location for a day-long workshop for adults on preparing for the Yuletide festivities. Morning is devoted to making gastronomic Christmas dishes; the afternoon to creating traditional, hand-made decorations. Dec 6, 10.30am-4.30pm (booking essential). Sutton House, 2 & 4 Homerton High St, Hackney, E9 (020 8986 2264).

RHS Christmas Flower Show Specialist nurseries exhibit exquisite poinsettias, hellebores, hederas & other seasonal plants, while horticultural stalls offer useful gift ideas for gardening enthusiasts. Dec 12, 13. Tues 11am-7pm; Wed 10am-5pm. RHS Lawrence Hall, Greycoat St, SW1 (020 7649 1885).

THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS PICTURE LIBRARY



A maritime memorial to Churchill

The ship that took the coffin of Sir Winston Churchill down the River Thames at his state funeral in 1965 is to become a floating memorial to the former British prime minister and World War II hero.

The *Havengore*, a one-time Port of London survey boat, is undergoing a major restoration following its rescue from a Kent shipyard by a New Zealand businessman. In April 2001, the 87ft-long ship will be ready to take students of modern history on short trips around Britain and continental Europe. When she is not sailing, visitors will be able to board the *Havengore* at Chatham Dockyard in Kent and to see a permanent exhibition of papers from the Churchill Archives Centre.

The *Havengore* was built in 1956 for hydrographic survey work, which involved taking soundings to test the depth of the Thames. For such a practical role, she was made to a lavish specification. Her dark-blue hull consisted of flush jointed teak planks over an oak frame and her superstructure was formed of clear varnished natural hardwood.

But, due to high maintenance and operation costs, the boat was forced out of service in 1995, and when New Zealander Owen Palmer spotted her four years ago, she lay abandoned in the Thames. Her teak structure was cracked, ports were broken, furnishings damp and rotten. Concerned about her plight, Palmer set up the *Havengore* Trust to buy the vessel. Restoration work began in June 97.

"We're using specialist boat builders and volunteers to bring her back to her former glory," explains Sally Browne, a member of the *Havengore* Trust. "The ship's special link to Churchill provides an incredibly exciting platform for provoking discussion among the public about the course of modern history."

The *Havengore* played a key role in Churchill's funeral on January 30, 1965. Following a service at St Paul's Cathedral, his coffin was placed on board the ship at Tower Pier for a 15-minute journey to Festival Hall Pier. The short river trip was a fitting tribute to a man who had great affection for all things maritime.

For more details, call the *Havengore* Trust on 01634 813057.

CLAIRE HUTCHINGS

Christmas Day Swim Wrap up warmly to cheer on around 30 members of the Serpentine Swimming Club, who compete for the annual Peter Pan Cup over a chilly 100-yard course. Dec 25, 9am. Serpentine, Hyde Park, W2.

A Tudor Christmas Visitors to Henry VIII's vast palace are treated to the sights, smells & flavours of Tudor times. A fire-eater entertains in the Clock Court while, elsewhere, there is dancing to the music of sackbut, shawm & bagpipe & amusement at the antics of the court jester. Dec 27-Jan 1, 10am-4pm. Hampton Court Palace, East Molesey (020 8781 9500).

The Daily Telegraph Adventure Travel & Sports Show All the latest holiday adventures to unusual destinations, plus talks on daredevil sports like climbing & river-running, & on volunteer work abroad. Jan 12-14. Fri noon-6pm; Sat, Sun 10am-6pm. Olympia, W14 (0115 912 9115).

LISTINGS COMPILED BY
IAN JOHNS & ANGELA BIRD



PA PHOTOS

Art for sale: Sir Terry Frost's *Café Royal*, top left, is just one of the 20th-century British & Irish artworks up for auction at Phillips New Bond Street on Nov 21

Chill out: An invigorating dip helps counteract the effects of Christmas excess for members of the Serpentine Swimming Club, above




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